

THE STREET OF FACES:
CLIMPSSES OF TOWN

CHARLES VINCE

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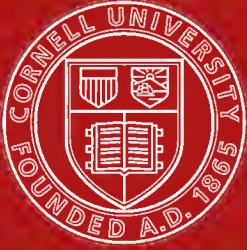


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THE STREET OF FACES.



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The Street of Faces: Glimpses of Town.

BY

CHARLES VINCE.

With Eight Drawings

BY

J. D. M. HARVEY.

NEW YORK:

E. P. DUTTON & CO.

TO MY WIFE.

A LIST OF THE DRAWINGS.

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TWO HOURS IN LONDON.

I set out one day trying to remember what it was like to be in London for the first time. For two hours I walked, seeing many things, but whether I found what I went in search of I do not know.

I set out westwards from Ludgate Circus, which once was the end of London, first looking up at St. Paul's. For to look up at St. Paul's and all the traffic climbing to it under the dark railway arch is to remember that London was once a little walled town and that it stood on a hill looking far away to other hills, northwards to the hills of Hampstead, southwards to Gipsy Hill and eastwards across unending, empty marshes, where the river wound slowly towards the seas. That is the chief purpose and beauty of St. Paul's. It allows no one to forget that once London stood as a walled city on the top of a hill.

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Then I turned and went quickly along Fleet Street. It is a dark, forbidding street. It seems still haunted with the memories of Alsatia, that lawless refuge of all the criminals of London, which once lay between it and the river. It is a street breathing still the Middle Ages; a strange home for the newspapers of England.

Temple Bar has gone, but no one could doubt that at the end of Fleet Street there was once a gate, for here to this day, as one passes round St. Clement Danes into the Strand, one knows that something has ended and something else begun. Before you is the building of the Australian Commonwealth, white and new, the most massive and the most aggressive of all the buildings in London. It is shaped like a wedge and the head of the wedge points straight at St. Clement Danes. As you look at it you wonder if you should not walk round and find the whole Australian Army Corps pushing it on from behind. Here in stone is the very spirit of the Dominions, impatient of England and its slow ways, its tolerance and its odd affections for absurd things that are old. Here it is, driven like a great spearhead of stone into the very heart of London, but it has stopped suddenly before that grey church and the dark street beyond. And on the other side of the church, facing with book in hand up Fleet Street,

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serenely unconscious of that aggressive building behind him, stands the statue of Dr. Johnson. If the building thrusts any further Dr. Johnson will turn round. He will see it. He will realise what it is. He will say something worth hearing.

Modern London begins when you have turned St. Clement Danes and entered on the Strand. It is a noisy, dusty and riotous place. At one end of Fleet Street St. Paul's keeps its serene watch; at the other stand the Law Courts. Though the Press of England lives in the old haunts of Alsatia it is well guarded. But in the Strand the Spirit of the Streets has escaped from Law and Church. It goes on with a fling, scarcely stopping to look out of all the noise and dust, down those little steep streets that lead from it, with their old names and at the bottom of each a sudden glimpse of grey water and green trees. It hurries on remembering only that at the other end of the Strand the trains come in from the Continent. And where they come in is one of the strange contrasts of London, the Cross of the Queen standing in the station yard. It stands in the middle of noise and ugliness like a tall and beautiful ghost. You wonder why it is still there, as you wonder why ghosts still haunt old houses that were once beautiful but have fallen into poverty and decay.

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If anyone desires to know what is aristocracy he has only to walk from the Strand into Trafalgar Square. Aristocracy is there before him in the statue of King Charles. That statue, in these days of enormous buildings and great figures, seems almost ludicrously small; but it is not conscious of that. It is conscious only that it is better dressed, more cleanly and finely made, more delicately bred, that it can ride a horse more cavalierly than those who hurry round it. There it debonairly sits, and year by year watches you and me and the rest of us as we crowd in Trafalgar Square, and listen to the speakers, and cheer and shout; it watches us and says—for the spirit in it is something altogether unmodern, being unmoved and unafraid before mere numbers and size—it says as it watches us, “These be only common people after all.”

Just across the street rises the Nelson Column. It stands for those beliefs to which the royal horseman is most indifferent. It is the very symbol of the thing that London, and all the great towns, and the whole of England did become after the Napoleonic Wars. They grew enormously. They grew too fast. They grew so fast that they had not time to think if they were growing in the right way. They did not care how ugly they grew if only they went on growing. So they stand

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opposite each other in every sense, that small, beautiful figure on the horse and that column which has grown too fast and too far. And Nelson on the top of it? But perhaps he is indifferent to either, for is he not looking southwards all across London and out to sea?

Whitehall is a street satisfying to an orderly mind. For it is such a street as one would expect to lead into the centre of the government of England, a large and dignified street. It seems to be free of those comic, incongruous, and to any mind but the English, those irritating things which are so common in London. All the way from Ludgate Circus we have found them—the press living in the ancient No Man's Land of crime; Dr. Johnson and Australia House; the Strand that has forgotten in its noise and bustle the river flowing near it and the very meaning of its own name; the Queen's Cross in the station yard; King Charles opposite the Nelson Column. But Whitehall goes down, even and undisturbed, to Westminster, as such a street should go—until it comes to Downing Street, and Downing Street is the most beautifully English of all English things.

About its entrance there is an admirable propriety. Its solid masses of buildings on either hand, its firm, broad pavements, its calm as of

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serious thought—do not these things suggest what government should be? And at the end of it, standing back, as if a little conscious that it was out of place, is No. 10. It might belong to any other part of London but its own. It might be in Chelsea. It might be in some little country town. It has a garden where there must be a cabbage-patch and a hen-run. It has a garden wall which boys might climb to steal apples. Since it has in some odd way become mixed with government I must believe that it was originally that rustic and delightful palace where the King counted his money while the maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes.

All around it are Government Buildings, but just across the way in St. James's Park, to keep it company, is the little cottage of the wild fowls, which has also come to London out of a nursery tale.

I went down the steps at the bottom of Downing Street into the park where the cottage is, and round by a little street to Broad Sanctuary, where on the left I looked up at the face of the Abbey and on the right down the long reach of Victoria Street; and if any one has forgotten how strange it is to look first at the Abbey and then at Victoria Street, he should go away from London and not come back to it for a long while. Victoria Street,

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like Fleet Street and the Strand and Whitehall, has its own character, and it is unlike any of the others. It is sombre, mysterious, and uniform. As you look up it from the Abbey it is like a street in mourning, seeming to leave it to other streets to express the riot and fever of modern commerce, and itself to express only its heavy and unlifting burden. At the end of this street, looking always down its sombre length, stands the great Gothic Abbey, facing it across Broad Sanctuary as King Charles looks across Cockspur Street at the Nelson Column.

I went under the archway, across Deans Yard, beautiful but faded, and out by the little passage into College Street, dark with trees, and so by Tufton Street into the Wilderness. For here, where a man of orderly and un-English mind would expect to find, behind the Abbey and the Palace of Westminster, the prosperous houses of men who have risen to be the Governors of a great nation, are little houses and poor streets where children play in the gutters.

So I went all the mournful way through Pimlico and came at last to the Thames at Chelsea Bridge. The river was empty and the tide was low, and on the other side were the thick trees of Battersea Park. There was then, and there seems always to be, over this reach of the river the quietness of

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an unvisited place. I could believe that Battersea Park was an unexplored forest and that no one had ever yet set foot on that further shore. It has kept, or perhaps it has found again, the spirit that belonged to it centuries ago, when far away to the eastwards London stood on a little hill.

OLD AUTOLYCUS.

The old man frequented the square and the streets round it, coming in any weather and seemingly indifferent to them all. He was not so much clothed as mysteriously contained in a mass of rags, for no single garment was distinguishable. It seemed impossible that he could ever take them off, but he looked as if from time to time he added to them from the trifles that he gathered. On his head was the relic of a tall silk hat; the gloss had gone from it these many years, and it had no brim, but in its form it was unmistakably a silk hat. Perhaps an expert might still have told the far distant year in which it had been new.

From under the hat great locks of grey hair curled, covering his ears and his neck, and they alone of him all still had a human and beautiful shape. His beard was without colour and looked like a torn piece of trampled and soiled old mat.

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On his back he carried a potato sack held across his shoulder with his left hand. In his right he had a stick which he pushed before him. It was as old, as colourless and as shapeless as himself.

He was bent almost double and moved without lifting his feet from the ground, never changing his pace but stopping every now and then to poke among any little heap in the gutter or to pick up the ends of cigarettes, which he slipped in among his clothing. In the early morning he would appear in the little streets, turning over the rubbish in the dustbins as they stood on the pavement. Sometimes when coal was delivered he would be seen waiting motionless on his stick until it had been poured through into the cellars and the men had gone away. Then he would gather up and put in his sack the fragments and dust of coal that they had left.

Where he went at nights no one knew, but one night when the road was being mended he made his way to the watchman's brazier, and warmed himself. Then he took two pieces of coal from his bag, put the larger back again and laid the smaller on the brazier. Evidently he was paying his share to the fire for the night, for that done he settled into a heap against a pile of wood blocks where the warmth could reach him, and stayed there until day.

OLD AUTOLYCUS.

He must have known hunger and thirst and the satisfaction of food and drink. He felt the pleasure of warmth. But did he feel more than that? No one could tell. He never spoke and no one had ever seen his eyes, for he went always bent above the pavement. At least his eyes were alive and quick for they missed nothing. It must have been years since he had looked up or been conscious of anything but the gutters. Had he forgotten that there were houses above the gutters and the sky above the houses? Did he remember that there were faces above the legs among which he shuffled in the crowded streets? No one knew.

On wet days he came as on fine, but while on the fine days he would move steadily through the appointed streets of his search, on wet days he would often be seen standing motionless on the pavements as if he rested. But no one could tell why he rested on wet days and not on fine; and no one could tell why on wet days he would cross the road and walk round the pavement outside the garden of great plane trees in the middle of the square. He went there only on wet days, and he picked up nothing, but would stay for a long time leaning on his stick. There was some shelter under the trees but it can scarcely have been for this that he went, for he seemed always to be unconscious of the rain.

THE STREET OF FACES.

One day chance introduced me to Old Autolycus. I saw a glint of silver in the dust and stepping forward picked up a shilling. As I picked it up I was aware of a stick poking forward at it and found him beside me. He too had seen it but had come just too late. He did not look up or speak but began to shuffle on. I spoke but he did not seem to hear, so I stood before him and held out the shilling. As he tried to take it I held it a moment and at that he looked up and I saw his eyes. He fumbled among his clothes to store the shilling away and then shuffled on without speaking, but I knew now that this strange figure was a human being.

Old Autolycus came to know me, for I would often stop him, holding out my stick in front of him as he tried, like some clumsy dumb creature, to shuffle away. I would give him things. Things I found he liked more than money. He would take anything however odd, broken and useless it was. He would take them all in the same way, showing no preference for one above another, until one day, remembering how he would stand for a long time watching the coal carts at work for the sake of a handful of dust, I brought him a large piece of coal and that he took with eagerness. Then I found that anything which would burn was what

OLD AUTOLYCUS.

he liked best. One day I gave him a box of matches and at that he looked up and there was real pleasure in his eyes. The box of matches made us friends. He no longer tried to shuffle by when I stopped him, and it became a custom for me to give, and for him to expect, a large box of matches one day every week. I do not know if he had any home, but I imagined him rather sheltering in corners of waste ground at night, making there his little fires and finding in their warmth his only pleasure.

Sometimes now he would speak, still looking at the ground in front of him and muttering in his beard. Of this odd muttering I understood nothing at first, and then only a word or two, and then I began to know rather by instinct than by hearing what he said. He too seemed to realise it when at last I really began to understand and no longer answered him at random. He would thank me and say that coal was good, or that matches were hard to find, or that it seemed long since it had rained; but still I did not know why it was that on wet days he would stop so often as he walked, nor why on those days only he would cross the road and go round the garden of the square.

One day when it rained I followed him. The wet pavements were as still and clear as a quiet

THE STREET OF FACES.

lake and I could see in them the sky, and here and there the window of a house, and lampposts enormously tall. He was standing above the reflection of a window when I came up to him, and then I understood. On fine days Old Autolycus went about his business searching for his trifles in the dust, but on these wet days when the rain turned the polished streets to mirrors he shuffled on his way, bent above his stick, and looked into his familiar pavements for the houses and the sky.

As I came up he turned and crossed the square. The pavement round the garden was as light as the wet sky and full of grey plane trees. It was a quieter mirror than any pool. No breeze or unwary touch could disturb it, and the trees stood up in it dark and clear. Besides the tallest of them stood Old Autolycus, and when I spoke to him he touched it with his stick, and I heard him mutter something about a bird. I looked down into the tree and then up at the tree above, but there was no bird on its empty boughs. I told him so, but he did not hear and he seemed to say (but it was hard to distinguish his muttering) that if he were not old now and deaf he would hear it sing. I left him standing above that grey mirror of the wet street looking at his tree. Then he crossed over again to gather some scraps of

OLD AUTOLYCUS.

coal out of the gutter and shuffle on his way. So there was more for him than the search in the dust of the gutters and the warmth of a fire at night. He found other things in his pavements, houses and trees and a bird that sang, but where the bird came from (for it was not there for me to see) I do not know.

The lark that tirra-lirra chants
With heigh! With heigh! the thrush and the jay
Are summer songs for me.

It must have been some bird out of a distant
summer, which sat for him alone on that tree.

MONEY MAKING.

If you want to cure a miser of his failing you should take him to the Mint. In the Mint I can imagine no one desiring money, nor anyone being tempted to steal. It is the one place where money has its true value and appearance as a mere symbol of wealth. Indeed, it falls below even that.

After a little time in the Mint you must argue strongly with yourself to be certain that coins have any value at all. It begins to appear ludicrous that they represent wealth or could be taken in exchange for any desirable thing. And not till you have gone out again to Tower Hill and looked at the soiled and used coins from your own pocket, and remembered with what effort they were earned, and how much you had given for them, will they get back their value again.

But your miser would go through the pains of

MONEY MAKING.

intolerable nausea. He would come out wan with the surfeit and horrible disgust. You can imagine his trembling excitement in the waiting room and across the court, and his amazement at the tranquil looks of the men who live and work in this, the native place of all delights, and are indifferent to it; his clutching, growing eagerness through the furnace-room and the rolling-room and the cutting-room and the annealing-room and the washing-room and the drying-room, until he comes at last to the room where the seventy-ton hammers stamp out the finished coins one hundred and twenty to the minute; and then imagine his despair.

He would see what he gave everything to possess, what he guarded and hid and fingered, emptied out of a machine into a bowl like water, and handled, by those who made them, without desire. He would not believe that these new and polished and common things could be the money he loved. You can imagine the sudden change from terrible delight when his eye first saw those gleaming bowls, to that more terrible disgust, like a man tricked by a mirage who gathers up two handfuls of water and, when it touches his lips, finds it nothing but hot sand.

You cannot help thinking that the men who work in the Mint and see money made by the

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bagful must feel it an enormous joke, or a sad imposture, when they give these things in return for the valuables of life. And what a strange thing pay-day at the Mint must be. Are the men really paid in money? I must believe that they ask for something more substantial. Can you expect a man who spends his time filling bags with coins, who sees them made by the thousand, who handles in a day more than any of us will handle in a lifetime, can you expect him to be content with a few of them for a week of work? If there is any place in the world where men insist on payment in food and drink, it must be at the Mint.

This is your fancy as you watch those stamping machines, as you see the silver discs dropped by the handful into the narrow chute, the metal fingers seize them one by one and thrust them under the stamp, the bowls fill with glossy coins, and the piled bags. But all the time you know that there is another thing always present that prevents these men from forgetting the value of money. Behind this stupendous profusion is the most minute care. They may handle sovereigns by the thousand, but they know that every one is weighed to the hundredth part of grain. In the Mint coins are made by the million, but the Mint is the one place where not even a threepenny bit

MONEY MAKING.

can be lost. It is a curious combination. I do not know that you could find it anywhere in the world but in a Mint, this profusion of money and this anxious care for every coin. What sort of balance must it make in a man's mind between the two extremes of feeling, that coins are worthless counters and that coins are more valuable than precious stones?

But why should it make any balance at all? I do not suppose that the men of the Mint ever think of those bagfuls of coins as money. Between the sovereign in the bags as they put it there, and the sovereign that is paid out to them, there is an impassable gulf of feeling, a gulf so great that you would not think the two coins were of the same substance. For the first is goods and the second is money, and the first belongs to the day's business, but the second to living and the pleasures of life.

The quarter of a million of shillings (or whatever the great figure may be) that this man at the stamping machine has put in bags during the last week, represents to his mind exactly those thirty-five shillings (or forty, or whatever may be his wage) which he is paid on Friday; and that man, with one hand gloved and the other naked, who stamps a single disc out of each long lath of silver and weighs it to test the lath's thickness, he—but

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observe, first, how delicately he does it. The gloved hand draws up the lath; the stamp falls; the lath, with a hole in it, is thrown down, and there is a silver disc in the naked hand. You watch lath after lath, and each time, as the stamp falls, the silver disc appears mysteriously and is placed on the scale; and each time you fail to see by which of those few, swift, precise gestures it came into the naked hand. You go away feeling that you have seen a conjuring trick—that man, though he weighs each disc with extreme care, will not get thereby an exaggerated idea of the value of money, any more than the stamper will have learnt contempt by the profusion of coins pouring from his machine; his mind is intent on a higher thing, on perfect accuracy.

In sum it does not matter at all whether your machines are making boots, or chocolates, or sovereigns. You might, I take it, spend a lifetime in the Mint, and yet spend your own money like an ordinary man. Even your miser, when he comes out again, will forget in a little the nausea of his surfeit, and return to his money bags. For he, no more than any other man, loves them for their own sake. To another they are symbols of what he will get with them. To the miser they are symbols of the efforts that he gave to get them.

ON PLAYING WITH A CROWD.

If, being allowed to become a child again, you had your choice between the country and the town to play in, I do not doubt that you would choose the first. All the arguments of later years are in favour of it. I do not mean arguments of health, which are beside the matter, but arguments for the game. You would say that the country is the more romantic place; it is freer, and has the better properties for play; it makes the finer battlefield, it is an open space for the imagination. You would remember those games of hide-and-seek through twilit barns, and the ominous shapes of trees and hayricks and all the pleasant fearfulness of the silent, unlighted coming of night which brought a tremor of reality into the feigned terrors of the game. What are the streets and gardens of a town beside those enchantments?

But have you ever played in a crowd, the

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crowd of a London street, a crowd that flows on unceasingly, too occupied to notice any strangeness in its path, a continual moving scene? You will remember, no doubt, how acutely and truly it is recorded in "When a Man's Single" that in London streets you may eat buns as you walk, and no one will notice you. You will have seen how the strangest dresses of foreigners and fantastics pass along unnoticed; you will yourself have seen a hundred oddities, given them only a glance and forgotten them three steps later.

There is but one thing (besides accidents) which will check that flow, the sound of a loud voice. That is why the crowd of a London street is such a glorious property; in its way as fine a scene for play as the lofts and hayricks where you lay, and the ditches where you crept unseen. It moves, but sees as little as the trees. You are as hidden and solitary there as in the wooded country.

You may go your ways, unnoticed and unnoticed, in that crowd, which, by its very greatness, is blind and dumb, with a life only like the life of running water. Or if you will you can use it to swell the excitement of battle. Could you have a better scene for one of those dim battles, those confusions of night fighting, when all order is lost and you cannot tell foe from

PLAYING WITH A CROWD.

friend; when you move among that unconscious crowd not knowing what figure may not be an enemy, or what hand may not suddenly be raised against you?

Or if you are older and have grown vanities you may fight with a consciousness of spectators, an inspiring thing at a certain age. You can turn that crowd as you will to your own uses, make a property of it for your play, have it animate or inanimate as you choose. The crowd of a London street is a glorious thing to play with.

It is not I who have made these discoveries but some of the smaller population of Soho. A military spirit has taken hold of them. I am not in their secrets. I do not know what armies lie hid, nor what campaigns are prepared, nor what battles fought in its smaller streets, nor what blood is spilt in its unfrequented doorways. But I have more than once come on detachments of some army not more than four feet high, marching with great precision and intentness, and this not in any of the obscurities of the district, but in the noisy civilian thoroughfares. Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road have seen them.

They passed for a moment and were gone. The uniform was unknown to me, serviceable cocked hats of pink paper, and broad swords of wood, two-edged and very wickedly pointed. It

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was an army of three, well-drilled besides being well accoutred. You must see it to understand the contrasts it made with the loose-moving civilian crowd, in the very midst of which it went. It was like the spark of Murat's charge among the smoke of the scattered enemy. It turned a corner, and for all you knew there would be a battle in the next street. I have seen other detachments going mysteriously. And twice I have seen the territory of these great thoroughfares invaded by more than armies on the march.

The battle itself has rolled down among the legs of their hurrying crowds, pistols have been fired and swords used on the very pavements where we wait for the 'buses, and once I was all but involved and destroyed in an ambushade from the lighted doorway of a newspaper shop in the upper part of Shaftesbury Avenue, when there was some very pretty firing from the knee, and at least one corpse, which died with the manner of a tragedian. The air was full of the noise of clicking pistols. These, though skilled and vivacious fighters, and armed with the latest weapons, were guerrillas.

The second battle was between regulars, the very army of three in the pink cocked hats that I had seen on the march. It was a battle of the broad-swords, fought within a few yards of

PLAYING WITH A CROWD.

Piccadilly Circus. I saw neither the beginning nor the end but only half a dozen telling blows when the combat was at its height. The Master Crummleses themselves could not have surpassed them for grace and vigour. This time there were spectators, a respectful circle of them. But the three noticed them not. I passed on a 'bus. I remember the superb air with which the third leaned on his sword while the others fought. But were they altogether unconscious of the crowd? I think that perhaps in this battle, and in that other where the guerrilla died with an air, we were a dim house of spectators, who added a gusto.

But I like them best when they are marching with that awful mystery and that intent air which belong only to armies in cocked hats of paper (other armies may sing and joke on the march, in a paper cocked hat you must be solemn) when the passing crowd is to them what trees and hedges are to other children, the scene of the play.

I wish that I could wear a pink cocked hat and play with the crowd in Shaftesbury Avenue instead of being only one of the drops in its unceasing flow.



24.11.14
1924

THE GULLS OF HAMPSTEAD.

captain if he suddenly stepped off his bridge, with the rime of the salt on his eyebrows and the colour of the wind in his cheeks and the water running down his oilskins, into the middle of a Hampstead drawing-room. So too the gulls dwarf the proper owners of the garden, the sparrows and the robins, into the most comical round creatures. As they come beating down to the sheltered lawn, with their lean bodies and great sickle wings, you know that they are the true inhabitants of the air, and that these garden birds are only bush dwellers after all.

They come with more than the glamour of travellers from the sea. When they sail in with the snow, out of a grey sky, above white tree tops and white roofs, they look as if they too had gone through the same rare winter change, as if they had just passed out of a frozen cloud and were coming down with its snow on their wings.

A long frost makes them our familiar fellow citizens; and all day long they sweep and wheel above the gardens, waiting to dive among the bushes for food as if these were the sea. One clear winter morning, just as the red sun was coming up above the holly bushes, we put pieces of raw fish out in the snow. The sky was empty but we had scarcely turned when a harsh cry came from high above the trees and a gull in full sail

THE STREET OF FACES.

hove in sight. His call brought others after him until there were twenty sailing round between the bushes of the little garden. They circled it in great sweeps, flying lower and lower, filling its air with a tumble and clamour of whiteness, seeming to go faster and faster as they came nearer to earth, their wings almost brushing the windows and the low red sun flashing their shadows through it on the walls.

While they still filled the air like a monstrous snow storm, a dishevelled black imp of a starling hopped out, a true Cockney—he might have been one of Lamb's own chimney sweeps, not yet gone to heaven but living first the contented life of a bird among the roofs and chimneys where once he had toiled—a true Cockney, knowing himself in his very own London, swaggering and unabashed, but with a heart of courage in his impudence—this fellow of a starling, I say, hopped out right under the cyclone of wings that one expected would send him whirling like a dead leaf, across the snow, and settled on a piece of fish larger than himself. Then the twenty gulls, flattening back their sails as they check and hover above a wave crest, came down to the snow, touched it for a moment as they caught up their fish, and stretched their wings to the air again.

The starling, even when they enveloped him,

THE GULLS OF HAMPSTEAD.

had not turned a feather. He still occupied his enormous theft, utterly indifferent to the white storm that had come and then passed as swiftly again over the trees. It had passed all but one gull. He stayed, standing first on one leg then on the other, as if in some embarrassment. He looked at the house. It was clear, as if he had spoken, what thought had suddenly come to him : " A devil of a queer place," he seemed to say, " to find raw fish in." Then he too flew away, and the starling hopped back to the bushes. He had asserted his right to be there. He had pushed his way in among these birds, who might be very fine and large and white and swift but were only strangers after all. He had proclaimed that in London there is no one better than a Londoner. This done he hopped back to his bush.

The gulls came many times to that garden, and stayed to eat in the snow under its windows. They were all beautiful and all alike except for that one thoughtful fellow who had been struck the first time by the strangeness of such a place for fishing. Him it did seem possible to recognise again, for he had a character of his own. It was noticeable that while he seemed to arrive first, and certainly stayed after the rest had gone, he was scarcely at all concerned with eating. He seemed rather to be a watchful outpost to the

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party. Once only did he condescend to a meal. He waited until he was alone and then settled to it contentedly and without fear, pecking away with those quick affected turns of the head that all birds use. For a time after he had done he stood quite still in the snow.

I have seen a gull—and it was so apt as to seem almost to be done with the pleasure of conscious art—fly down to complete a great picture of sunlit colours. A wave of green turf stood up against a deep blue sea, and the gull settled on the very edge of the wave, gleaming white, beside a single flaming poppy. But even he was less beautiful than this solitary watchman of the winter camp standing in the snow. The gull's breast is one of the few white things that do not lose their colour beside the snow's whiteness; and against that background, you see, with a singular clearness, the delicate pure grey of its wings. But its beauty has something more rare than a mere beauty of pure colours. Standing there he seemed more airy and fanciful even than a bird. Those grey pencillings and the black tips of his wings were very clear, but all the rest—so still he stood—merged in the snow. He seemed himself a thing half of snow, that at the first touches of the sun would disappear, leaving, where he had been, no more than a grey shadow of wings.

LIGHTED WINDOWS.

Only a few men can ever be artists, but everyone of us can make one picture in this world. He can put a light in his room at dusk and leave the curtains undrawn.

Of all the lights that were lighted again in the November of 1918 to welcome peace, none—not even the street lamps putting off their hoods of war—was so beautiful as the simple lights in the uncurtained windows of the houses. One looked in at their tables and their books, at the pictures on their walls and the deeper glow of their fires, as in the ages of walled towns a man must have looked at the fields and gardens outside the walls and, seeing them cultivated and in bloom, said to himself, “ This town is now at peace.”

It was once the royal command in times of great rejoicing that at night every citizen should put candles in his windows, and so light up the town.

THE STREET OF FACES.

That command might have been repeated, in another way, when the Armistice of the Forest of Compiègne was signed. The best command of all that day would have been : " That all citizens this night do light the lights as usual in their rooms, but from dusk until bedtime do leave their curtains undrawn." Then one would have gone through the still darkened streets of war and looked in at room after room, now at the end of four years lighted again, and tranquil, and unafraid of the night. Of all acts, that sudden drawing of the curtains would have been the most real and most beautiful sign of the return of peace.

It used to be a rule of childhood that one must not look in at other people's windows. But if it is dusk and the room is lighted and the curtains undrawn, why then it *is* permitted, and I look in as I would look at any picture. For in every lighted window is the beginning of romance. These rooms into which one looks from the darkened street are unlike any room that one can ever enter, and the people in them are more than men and women. They have become players. They are there, as in a play, for some unknown but imminent purpose. Yet however long you stand and stare across the railings you can never know what that purpose is. Even a simple tea party seen thus from the outside is fraught with

LIGHTED WINDOWS.

dooms. How many fewer plays would be dull if you could never stay until the end! It is so with these scenes of the lighted windows. They have all the romance of unfinished plays.

One night I watched a man go in at his own front door, close it, disappear, and then in a minute enter a lighted room, and his wife rose to greet him. What great or sad news had he brought that night? I waited in suspense, although I knew that I should never know. He kissed her and sat down in his chair. And I went on my way. I was convinced, because that curtain was undrawn and I looked in as at a stage, that some comedy or tragedy had begun that night when he opened the door and his wife rose from her chair to greet him.

Yet there is something more in these lighted windows than this bright lit resemblance to a stage. Though you had never been in a theatre you would still be caught and held in the street by their romance. They have the age-old beauty, born with the first fire that was ever lit, and glowing still, which every lighted place has for a man walking through the mysteries of the night. And besides this ancient and romantic thing they have also the romance of all that is unattainable. You suddenly possess, in those lighted rooms, things which will never be yours. You are

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suddenly intimate with men and women whom you will never know, and in that brief moment are their friend. How witty is the talk which you cannot hear; how beautiful those pictures which you can only half see; how desirable that book which you will never read; how wonderful that open door through which you will never go!

Citizens who are disappointed with your own lives, who fret at their narrow way and grow weary at their dull employment; who long to be beautiful, and ask "Where is romance?" do but light your rooms at dusk and leave your curtains undrawn, and you will never know to how many travellers in the outer darkness your familiar room has become beautiful and mysterious as a picture, and you yourselves the players in a great romance.

THE ECONOMIST.

I had just begun to read my evening paper when the man opposite leaned across the carriage and touched me deferentially on the knee.

“Excuse me, sir,” said he, “but if you would be so good as to hold your paper at its full length instead of folding the bottom half behind the top, I should then be able to read the back page while you read the front.”

I had not time to be astonished. He spoke with the air of a man asking a favour, it is true, but a favour so natural and simple that no one would refuse it. For there are certain small familiar favours which it is an insult to refuse. He spoke as if asking one of these.

Before thinking I had replied mechanically in the same manner.

“Certainly,” said I, and dropped the bottom of the paper.

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It was then, while I read the principal news and he the cricket scores, that I had time to feel astonished. I was astonished exactly as you are when you greet a stranger thinking him to be a friend and then find yourself mistaken. His manner was so familiar that I had taken what he would say for granted, and then only on reflection had discovered it to be something entirely strange.

When I finished the first page I looked up instinctively. He was waiting and caught my eye.

“Quite,” said he, smiling.

I turned the page, and so page by page we read through the paper.

It was while I read the cricket scores, slowly, so as to give him time to get through the principal news of the day, that I decided to speak to him. I will put a sudden question to him, thought I, and surprise him into an amiable answer, just as he surprised me.

When he had finished I laid down the paper and spoke suddenly.

“Every day of my life,” said I, “I meet paperless men who glance over my paper surreptitiously, snatch at sentences from it, and then, when I look at them, stare diligently in the other direction. But no one ever spoke to me like that before. Why did you?”

He smiled very frankly, not at all embarrassed,

THE ECONOMIST.

but as if he were grateful for something kindly and happily said.

“ You are annoyed, not so much because they read what you are reading, but because they are ashamed of doing it. You would not notice their impertinence if they themselves were not so conscious of it. You are, in fact, disturbed not when they look at your paper but when they look away from it.”

“ I had never,” I answered, “ taken the trouble to analyse my feelings to that fine point of discrimination, but I think you are right.”

“ Now I,” he said, “ am not ashamed. That is the world of difference between us. You said that no one had ever spoken to you as I did. I was glad to hear you say it. I believe it to be true. There are thousands of men in our own middle-class who practise these small economies, who read another man’s paper in order to keep their own penny, who will walk the last hundred yards to save a halfpenny on a ’bus, who—I could give you hundreds of examples.

“ But you will note that all these thousands are ashamed of what they do. I am the only man I ever met who did these things and was not ashamed. I speak, as I say, of our own middle-class. The very rich and the very poor can save their pennies without shame. The very rich

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because when you have more money than you know how to use, the distinction between one coin and another becomes infinitesimal, and the saving of a penny and the saving of a pound are acts of almost identical value. The very poor because a penny is so large to them that there is the virtue of a serious act in saving it. Women also practise this penny-saving, and being braver than we, do not do it meanly and surreptitiously. But they are no less ashamed; they are economical with ferocity, with defiance.

“ I do not know any sight more sad than the fierce helplessness of a woman in a 'bus, as she tries to keep on her knee the child that is struggling to get a seat for himself, and uses every false and soothing reason that she can think of. But why be defiant in economy? I am always urbane.”

Here the fantastic creature paused a little.

“ But do not think,” he went on, “ that I have always been so. I was once ashamed, like other men, of my economies. How well I remember the fierceness of my shame when, as a little boy, I was taken, my sister and I, to a tea shop by our mother, and she, being poor, ordered tea for two only (there is always tea for three in a pot for two if you have a second jug of hot water), and made me drink from the saucer. I admire her now.

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But that instinct is hard to expel. I had continually to combat it in me, with the reasoning which I knew to be sound. In the end I triumphed, and now I am economical without shame, with urbanity, and with an almost holy pride, because I know that in this one thing I am sane and all the rest of men are not.

“ I am a man of humble ambitions. To have attained sanity, to act with reason even in so small a thing, where all other men are unreasonable, has satisfied me. I find as keen a pleasure in the dignified saving of a small sum by ingenuity, by courtesy, or (and here he bowed) by judging rightly of the courtesy of another, as do most men in making fortunes. Believe me, there are innumerable ways of saving a penny, all interesting and satisfying in themselves.”

“ And what,” said I, “ do you do with the pennies that you save ? ”

He sprang in his seat, and his face went red. His lips quivered.

“ Sir,” said he, “ I have not given you my confidence in order that you may insult me.”

I was astonished, and then most confusedly sorry for what I had said.

“ Sir,” said I, in my turn, “ you must forgive me. I blundered ; but, believe me, I had seen that you were an artist in economy.”

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He was at once appeased. His lips settled into calm again. He spoke with his rather quaint dignity.

“Artist!” said he; “I thank you for the word. But did you ever know an artist who was not extravagant? Have you never yourself spent five guineas because you were so elated at having made one?”

He shook his head at me, and smiled whimsically and a little sadly.

“I could,” he said, “out of my own experience, out of my fantastic and amusing adventures as an economist in trifles, write a very interesting book on the falsehood of the saying that if you take care of the pennies the pounds will take care of themselves. Believe me, that is not true. Economy has kept me entertained, but it has kept me in poverty. Take this evening, for example. I have read the news in comfort and without cost to me. I am pleased to have saved that penny, because it was well done, and I do not doubt that in my elation I shall spend on a magazine, which is a luxury to me, a shilling which I can ill afford.”

With that he bowed again, and the train having just stopped, got out.

THE GATES OF LONDON.

It was during the second winter of the war, when at night all England was darkened and, for the first time since the Dutch fleet sailed up the Thames, London knew familiarly the sound of guns. But in this inn among the winter quietness of the sleeping Surrey woods London seemed very far away, and in the mind of its old waiting maid how much further still?

Of all the beliefs of ignorance it is hers that I would most like to share. She came in to draw the red curtains across the windows and she stayed to talk of the last Zeppelin raid, of the darkened houses, and of the soldiers who put barriers across the roads to stop all the cars.

“ And they do say,” she said, “ that that night all the gates of London were shut.”

She had served in this inn perhaps twenty years, perhaps more. Every Sunday, in the summers

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before the war, it was crowded with visitors come down from London, its yard was full of their cars and the London 'bus rolled down the road which passed its door. In the winter it was solitary and remote among the woods, but on summer days the life of London flowed about it, and on any clear evening, from the hill behind, the lights of London could be seen, colouring the sky. Yet all those years she had kept her invincible, great ignorance of London. Living within sight of the glow of its lights, waiting on its citizens, hearing their talk, she yet was further away from it than from some distant city of the Middle Ages.

Such phrases as hers, these unexpected, irresponsible fancies of ignorance, are the first bubbles blown of poetry, and a little knowledge would prick them. I would not go beyond that one fine, clear phrase: "They do say that that night all the gates of London were shut." To have asked more would have been to get, most likely, something vague and puzzled and disappointing in reply. Yet what image had she of London that made her speak of its gates? Certainly it was not such a little walled town as that phrase of hers brings to our minds, who know so much. For her own little country town lay open to its fields. In her ignorance she could build more gorgeously than you and I. She could



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make a wall greater than the great wall of the Romans that shut off all Britain from the north. If she saw London with gates, and guards to close them, it was for the very reason that to us it must remain always unwalled, because it was immense. A city so enormous, so populous, so renowned, must be strong. A little country town might lie unguarded, but not so an Imperial city. Because of its immensity she saw it with its high walls, its sentries and its gates, with all the visible and antique signs of security and power, and if she had ever set out for London she might have walked right across it, from Ealing to Ilford and from Croydon to Finchley, and never found it.

What would you not give (you who could build a gorgeous, wonderful city out of that old woman's belief) to think as she? Every night you would climb that hill behind her inn, to watch the distant reflection of its lights on the clouds. By day you would almost see the turrets rising higher than church spires and the pacing men upon the walls. You would think that you heard, across twenty miles, the clang of the great gates. Who would not be willing to come no nearer London than he might think of it so?

You may laugh if you like at her ignorance, but sometimes such ignorance reaches nearer wisdom than much common knowledge. She knew

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nothing of London, yet she had the essential truth that so great a city, if it is to endure, must be strong; and is there a better way to represent it than by a wall too high to climb and great gates that can be shut?

This chance poetry of ignorance is a fragile thing, but it is of the true stuff of poetry. It stops short of all that common knowledge beyond which the dreams of the poets lie secure, but in its own way it can speak the same great truths.

THE ASHBINS OF PICCADILLY.

I told to a poet the story of the old woman who believed that there were gates to London and that at night the gates were shut. He was greatly moved by the tale.

"If," said he, "she has dreamed of such a London, that London exists. Somewhere it exists, or all that the poets have said of great dreams is not true."

So we went to look for this London of the Middle Ages, this town with gates that could be shut.

"You may be sure," said the poet, "that what would chiefly delight your old woman in London, and what, like all country people, she would most wish to see, would be the great shops with their enormous windows. They also are part of the London of which she dreams. If we would find it we must look in the places where we ourselves would least expect it to be."

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We looked for it in many places and at many times, but chiefly at that time when it is already evening in the streets but still daylight above the chimneys, and the first lights appearing in the upper windows of the dark houses are as clear and beautiful as stars; and twice the poet believed that we had found what we sought. The first time—for he was strongly moved by names and would make nonsense rhymes, which he would sing aloud as he made them, out of the names of the shops—the first time was one evening when we turned from Oxford Circus and found ourselves in Kingly Street, and there we saw a pedlar with all his wares spread on the ground before him, and a van that filled the little alley almost from house to house, waiting to go by. The second time was one late afternoon as we went down Regent Street, and there the poet discovered Man in the Moon Passage. One might pass it a dozen times and never see it, for now it is almost hidden by great curving plate glass windows with jewels in them.

Seeing it for the first time the poet was certain that it could never have been there before, that it had opened suddenly and if we were not quick would close again. He dashed down it crying that this was the gate to the London of the old woman's dream or else a short cut to fairy-land;

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but at the bottom he found only a dark inn, and two evergreen bushes growing in tubs, and though he would not be content until he had gone right through the inn and out on the other side, he found it was no short cut to fairy-land but only to Piccadilly.

We searched in these ways for a long time and never found the London that we sought. For we sought it, as we now know, with too much art, choosing such times as we thought most favourable. In that we were wrong. All the great discoveries come to men carelessly in the full stride of the day. So it was with us.

It was a blowing, gusty morning in spring and still early, when we went eastwards along Piccadilly, where the trees of the Green Park were busy in the wind. There was a freshness in that wind as it flung itself about us, throwing up its arms and shaking the trees, which spoke, for a moment, of the sea. At the end of Piccadilly, where it is very narrow, we saw waiting all along the curb-stone a row of little ashbins. They were piled high with cabbage leaves and egg shells and broken boxes and ashes from the grates, and some had spilt over into the gutter. There they serenely stood, on the edge of the street, while the crowding traffic of the morning hurried past them.

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At the sight of those ashbins—there were seven in a row—the poet stopped, and then solemnly and almost reverently he said :

“ At last we have found it. I do not know when we passed through the gates; our eyes must have been closed, for certainly we have passed through them. Here is our mediæval London, the London of the old woman’s dream, and it is where it should be—in the very heart of the modern London. Behind us is Piccadilly with its trees and tall houses, and that dip in the road which is one of the most beautiful of all the beautiful things in London. Before us are all the theatres of London. To the right are the clubs and the parks and the palaces, to the left are the great shops, and here in the middle of it all, here where we stand, are these ashbins, all in a row, waiting for the dust-cart to come. Here at the beginning of this spring morning, when all London is going to work, here at the heart of the Empire, stand these seven little ashbins, blowing in the wind.

“ If the old woman of the inn were with us now she would be satisfied. Just round the corner are the great windows of Regent Street, which to her would be beauty and wealth and romance, and here are these ashbins to proclaim that London with all its strangeness and its vastness and its

ASHBINS OF PICCADILLY.

riches is at heart the same as her own little town. If she were with us now she would walk back along Piccadilly looking for the great gate."

And I said :

" Think for a moment of the American visitors who glory in the Middle Ages, who regret that London does not still drink the water from the well in the Tower, who will not eat their lark and oyster pie at the Cheshire Cheese unless they can sit in Dr. Johnson's seat. How romantically, how delightfully they search for the bones of the Middle Ages, and finger and smell its dust, yet here it is still living in the midst of us and yet they do not come. No one has ever brought a camera to photograph the ashbins of Piccadilly in the morning."

" But they shall come," said the poet, " for I will sing a song of the ashbins. I will write a poem on them. It shall be addressed to the London County Council. It shall praise all the Aldermen and Councillors, mentioning them by name—if any of them have names that would go well in a song. It shall be a song in their praise for allowing such things to be. It will be a great song, the greatest I have ever written."

And in his excitement he kicked one of the ashbins so that the egg shells fell off and the wind caught up the fine dust of the ashes in a little cloud

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and sent a piece of the paper fluttering and whirling round the Flying Boy in Piccadilly Circus.

So the poet went away to write his song to the London County Council. It was to begin in the inn where the dream was born and took flight, and to end by the little ashbins where the dream, at last, was found. But the names of the London County Council were not well fitted for singing, and before the song was well begun another thing caught the poet's fancy and he began another song. For that reason I have written the story of this quest, why it was made and how it ended, in plain prose.

LONDON DOCKS.

London Docks are like a song out of Mr. Kipling—one of his hot, exultant songs on the wealth of Empire and the wonders of trade, the songs that he sang when he was young, as other poets sing of the women whom some day they will love.

No one need have crossed the world, nor have been to sea, nor even have gone beyond the sight of London houses to understand those songs. He has only to go to the Whitechapel Road and down towards the river, until he comes to the grey, curving wall, tall as a house and unbroken by any windows, which surrounds London Docks. It stands there immense and silent like a fort.

Within, where laden men move backwards and forwards between the storehouses and the quays, is trade, not common and popular, eager for profits, serving across a counter for ha'pence, but

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mysterious and magnificent with all the world coming to lay things at her feet. You follow her by long, high storerooms and deep cellars; through the smell of many spices; among men who talk familiarly of distant and strange towns, to whom Penang is as Brixton and Zanzibar nearer than Putney. Everywhere are goods set out as for a queen—rows upon rows of ivory; the tusks of the elephant and the walrus; the shapely horn of the rhinoceros, curved and pointed; the spear of the narwhal, five feet long and most delicately made in a spiral, already as finished and beautiful a work of art as a Spanish sword, and more swift and deadly than a harpoon; great, fat-sided jars of scent, still wearing the rope jackets in which they were carried, slung on poles, from the plantation to the coast; and bundles of long, slender cinnamon sticks, sending out a fine odour.

Beneath the storehouses you go through acres of cellars where the fungus of wine fumes hangs low upon the heavy roof above the barrels, ranged in their thousands and each with its history scratched on it in negligent marks. Everywhere you see immensity and order, and smell the strange smell of distant places brought suddenly and mysteriously near, until you feel at last a wonder and delight very near those sensations that Burke took as his test of the sublime.

LONDON DOCKS.

Mr. Kipling and his songs of an Empire's trade? London Docks are far older than these, for they have an age that is not their own, that ancient ships must have brought them from the ports of the Levant. They seem the oldest thing in London, older even than Roman Wall. Those long storehouses, with their odour of many spices, take one back beyond the Elizabethans voyaging to Virginia, beyond the Dutch in the West Indies and the Spaniards in Mexico, beyond Venetians and Genoese and the Hansa League, back to Solomon of Israel and Hiram of Tyre; and above their gates might be carved the words "Come ships from Tarshish."

In the room where the elephants' tusks are ranged across the floor stand barrels full of small, plain rings of ivory. They are pieces from the tusks of the elephants of Zanzibar. Out of each a billiard ball has been cut; and now these rings that remain wait to go to India, where the Hindu women will wear them as bracelets. From Zanzibar to London, from London to Bombay, from an African elephant to a billiard ball, from a billiard ball, southwards and eastwards again, to be a Zenana trinket—all the apes and peacocks in the ships of Tarshish were not so strange as these unconsidered trifles of ivory in the barrels at London Docks.

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There is kept at the Docks in a museum of many odd things, one thing, which, if we still had the mediævalist's fine belief in a moral, we should set also above the gate where all would see it as they entered this fortress of an Empire's wealth. It was found when the docks were made—a stained, brown skull from one of the deathpits of the Great Plague.

MOTOR 'BUS CONDUCTORS.

It has not been enough observed by the travellers on the public vehicles of the street that the change from horse to motor brought a change of command. You may easily have missed this noteworthy thing, if, like most people, you are too much concerned with the mere mechanics of travel. The horse-'bus driver, for his part, was indisputably the captain of his 'bus. There he sat, rubicund, weather-red, strapped high on his bridge, and rolling a little to the uneasy motion. He had the whole thing under command. He was the observed and dominant figure. The conductor was a mere purser and steward aboard, collecting money and—wherever and so long as that generous custom existed—hurrying with beer at the halting places to the greater figure aloft, who would empty his glass at a single lift of his elbow and return it to the waiting servitor. Nothing could have shown more clearly their relative positions.

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And then there was the legend of his wit. But even without that he was a man of mark and command, set high up, but not so high as to be above human affairs; so that whether he said good things or not they were attributed to him. He was the presiding spirit and the figure-head of his vehicle, as well as its commander. He did, indeed, seem with his bluff appearance and his rolling gait (for he must have rolled when he walked, though a walking 'bus driver, like the dead postboy of earlier times, is a thing that no one ever saw) to have given a fleshly form to the attributes of the 'bus; and in any sudden metamorphosis he would have passed naturally into a 'bus by the easiest transition.

But none of these large and imposing qualities has descended to his successor. That dark and silent figure—though he brings a new point of similitude to our simile by sitting at a wheel—is not a commander. He is wrapped away in the solitude of his engine-room. He chooses to ignore the expectant (almost suppliant) traveller at the road-side. His eye is all for the distances. His shape is lean. His look is sombre. He seems hardly human, except, rarely, when he relaxes so far as to wink briefly in his little glass at the conductor.

He has no expanse either of figure or of

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manners, but is fixed with a sort of grim discontent on the business before him. You would say he was taciturn by nature as well as by circumstances, and disdained all the arts of command. He has never attempted to take that place which his predecessor occupied. He has descended, spiritually as well as physically, from the upper to the lower deck of his vehicle.

This place, left vacant, has been insensibly filled by the conductor. It is he who is now the ruling figure of the 'bus; and he has cultivated a manner to suit the change. Being not yet mellowed, he has rather the air of a man conscious of promotion. His whole pose and attitude are redolent of one who feels his position. His character is exactly expressed by those stiff black leggings which occasionally he affects. He is, in fact, an official.

He has a marked decision in his manner, and rings his bell as one who is used to be obeyed; when he walks round to speak to his driver you feel his condescension. How different from those days when he carried the beer and would tout for fares! Now he is in command. He has a tone of speech which is his own. It is bitter, sardonic, contemptuous, the tone of one perpetually among inferiors. But though he is sardonic and intolerant, and cultivates too much the

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brusqueness of the commander, he is not, at times, without a softer and more impish humour.

It happened one evening that I was aboard a 'bus which waited for a pursuing couple. From the top the conductor watched them stop on the curbstone to kiss before the woman climbed inside. At sight of this his figure, which was naturally easy and plump, stiffened with indignation, and he struck the side of the 'bus with his clenched hand till the whole frame of it rattled. At that the lovers parted, the 'bus moved on, and the plump figure of the conductor strutted down towards me in magnificent burlesque of the outraged commander.

Then as he caught my eye the pose melted suddenly from him, and his face, which had been compressed to a great affectation of severity, broke into benign dimples. He bent confidently above me. "If they was all-ll-ll to stop to kiss, sir," said he, "we should never get anywhere, should we?" And he drawled and prolonged that "all" in the drollest way, till it did, indeed, embrace in its amorous possibility everyone who ever had travelled or ever would travel by that 'bus. Then he went down, still brimming with innocent delight.

On another evening as I climbed the stairs I heard the voice of the conductor below me, a

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richness of fantastic good humour in its tones. "If you will say when you are ready, sir," he cried, and rolled each word with great gravity, and as if he enjoyed its flavour to the last letter, "I will give the signal for the ship to start." He waited, twinkling, and when I nodded, rang down to the engine-room. It was not that he was prompted by anything in my appearance suggesting the sea. It was more than a passing humour.

That magnificent man (so I believe) as he goes his way day by day through London streets, warms his heart with the jolly fancy that he is indeed at sea; that he is the captain of a ship; and every curbstone is a pier head to him and the distant street lamps are harbour lights. He could not have done it, I think, on every route, but fortune has favoured him. He goes out into the dimness of the suburbs by way of Oxford Street and the Bayswater Road; and that is a route, as you come eastwards by night, to brighten fancy and, for those so happily inclined, to recall the sea.

The Bayswater Road by night is the broadest and most quiet of streets—a street of great expanse; for on one side are high and deep piles of houses, rarely lit, and on the other the dark trees and openness of the park. The street lamps are a small thing in the middle of this darkness; and

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the 'buses run silent and very smooth, and more solitary than in other streets. You feel the night in the Bayswater Road. Far ahead through the darkness is the long line of red lights in Oxford Street. They might, indeed, be the quayside lamps of a great port. That impish, fanciful humour in the conductor is better aboard a 'bus than official brusqueness and competence. It is better even than the stable-yard jollity of the old style. Those two conductors, each in his own way, knew more than the mere pride of commanding. The first, the humourist, saw and laughed at the perpetual conflict in him between the man and the conductor. His soul was not to be confined by his black leggings. The second, more grave, had the poet's fancy.

THE OPEN AIR SALESMAN.

He has two well-approved methods of attracting his customers. The first is the way of which everyone would think at once. It is to make a noise. It is a good way. It has stood the test of years; and no later ingenuity can really supersede it—although attempts have been made. There is a more modern fashion of using a gramophone in place of the voice. The salesman stands in dignified silence behind this mechanical herald. With its music he charms his customers to him and then disposes of his goods in a well-bred undertone. But what a poor figure he is beside that other who throws himself vehemently into his business heart and lungs; gathers his crowd; holds it still; dominates it; forces the money up from its reluctant pockets—and all with his voice! There are drill sergeants with the same compelling way, who seem physically to draw their men across the ground, forcing their unwilling feet to go

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faster and faster. It is so that the salesman of the old school gathers a crowd round him. The most melodious of gramophones cannot do such things.

The second of the two ways must appeal to everyone. It is unexpected. It is witty. It is, in fact, simply to wear a comic hat. Nothing extravagant is necessary. An opera hat with a ticket stuck in front, a deerstalker worn like a helmet, some such plain hat with a touch of fancy added to it, is enough. This too is a method of which the value seems to be well established by experience. It is an undoubted fact, which anyone may verify for himself, that if a man of loud voice and confident gestures also wears a comic hat, you must stop and listen to him.

To the simple taste the open-air salesman would appear to protest too much, but a high coloured style is necessary to his business. A redundant emphasis and assertion may be pardoned him. When he sells a sixpenny ware and declares his readiness to give the purchaser ten shillings if he is dissatisfied, even the dullest must be convinced; and when he moves away the too eager youngsters who crowd about his stall, addressing them as "my lords," he is a figure of perfect and impressive suavity.

In one thing his art is superb, in his skilful



J. B. H. H. H. H. H.
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combination of goods. Thus you are offered, let us say, a china vase (a commodity much in favour with open-air purchasers) for four shillings. You are unmoved. You are offered it for half that sum. Still your money remains in your pocket. Then you are offered two vases for three shillings and sixpence, and you cannot, try as you will, resist the feeling that here is a bargain. Manifestly the feeling has nothing to do with mere mathematical calculation. This offer is only threepence better than that last which left you cold. But for some reason (which perhaps even the salesman himself does not altogether understand) it has become irresistibly seductive. "A gold watch, a pair of opera glasses *and* ten shillings for a guinea" is another offer of the same sort, and you can safely defy anyone (while admitting that the fact is true) to explain why this should be so much more tempting than a gold watch and a pair of opera glasses for eleven shillings.

There are other ways of winning your confidence. The purveyor of braces will wear a pair of his own goods attached to an exterior belt, while the owner of the stall of cloth caps will demonstrate his own honesty and the soundness of his wares by himself trying on each cap in turn. It is a proof which no purchaser could witness unmoved.

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There are some things—second-hand clothes, pots and pans, and kitchen wares, the furniture of many barrows—which anyone, however unpractised, might make some shift at selling; for they are in common demand. Other salesmen again run a double business and so appeal to more than one need. I have known one who, while making second-hand linen the basis of his commerce, dealt in second-hand literature also. It was my good fortune once to have had the opportunity of buying with one coin and from the same hand, a soiled shirt-front and “The Glorious Future and Key to Revelation.”

Others again deal so gorgeously in colours that you would think no voice was needed to call custom to them. Of these are the dealers in fancy china. Its colours would dim the richest of Dresden and Sèvres. Its shape often seems scarcely to be of this world. Of these also is the dealer in coloured pictures (every picture two pence). He is a practitioner with a style of his own. He watches the eyes roving over his wares and waits for his moment, then : “Here you are, sir,” he says, “go *excellently* together,” and he is holding two pictures before you as though he had these two waiting ready for that customer to come who should most appreciate their harmony. His confident, unstudied air of the connoisseur, as he

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stands with them held out, is not to be described, and the purchaser goes away, happy possessor of a scene from an Eastern bazaar and an English coach and four in a snowstorm.

Of the dealers in rich colours also are the sellers of braces and the sellers of scarves. These two are notable figures. They disdain barrows and stand in the middle of the road, their necks, their shoulders and their arms so loaded with goods that you would think all transaction of business, the passing of money and the counting of change, impossible. I have seen a pair of braces offered for sale with roses on it of so glorious a red and leaves of so vivid a green that the fortunate wearer would only have to take off his coat to turn any street into a garden.

Others again are such austere specialists that you wonder how they can make a living. Can it be made out of nothing but liqueur glasses or amber cigarette holders, or gold paint in tubes or such pure conceits (delightful though they are) as rings made out of French pennies or wooden dolls in glass bottles? The sellers of such things must depend on sheer virtuosity.

Yet when all is said of the arts of these salesmen, nothing is so beautiful, so satisfying, so irresistible as to see what you buy pass first through all the travail of making and come to

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you at the end the completed thing. The man who gives you this fullness of emotion is the maker and salesman of apple fritters. He sits in his cart, which is his kitchen, with a pile of apples on his right hand, a deep bowl of batter on his left. In front of him is his cooking stove and all round him a silent, watching crowd. As the fritters are cooked in threes and passed, all hot, into little paper bags, the crowd moves up, one by one, to buy them. The fingers of the cook are never still. They pass perpetually from the slicing of apples to the batter, from the batter to the sizzling pan, from the pan to the paper bag, from the bag to the pence that are held out to him. Like a juggler he seems to have them in perpetual motion—apples, batter, pan, bags, pence. You see the whole process. You know what you will eat, and you watch those unresting fingers, that conceal nothing, with a horrible fascination, for though they are nimble as a pianist's they are dirty as a sweep's.

I admire that man as a salesman, I applaud him as an artist, but I will not eat apple fritters to-day.

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There is one room in the British Museum that is like a street. All the rest is a museum, a place of glass cases and the fragments of dead worlds; but through this one room you walk as among the living.

Have you ever, as you passed along a row of portraits and saw the men and women looking out at you, had a half-instinct to greet them as you would the living? If you have, then when you turn to your left as you enter the main doors of the museum and go through the two narrow rooms that take you across the Egyptian gallery, and with another turn to the friezes of the Parthenon, you will walk ready to raise your right hand in salute. These two rooms, where the busts of gods and emperors and heroes stand, are a street of faces.

I for one would rather walk through that street than through most of the streets where the bodies

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of the living go. For these are faces with the minds and the deeds of men cut into them; and the street is a living street, though the faces are of stone. But who has not felt that a street of the living (as we call it) is only a hurrying crowd of bodies with masks upon their shoulders?

What is "humanity in the mass" (that ironic phrase) beside the face of Julius Cæsar with those deep lines of pain, and those wonderful, tremulous lips, in which by some miracle the very softness of the original flesh has been given to the stone?

Time has been a second sculptor to some of those faces. Among the heads of the Cæsars and their empresses the thrusting blubber lips of Nero, the squatting brows of Caracalla, the bully neck of Vespasian, the scowl of Trajan, the majestic sad faces of the first two Antonines, and that regal head of hair waved and bound about the serene face of Crispina—there is one bust that time has played with. It is marked as being perhaps the bust of Julia Paula, who was wife of Elagabalus; but this is an after-thought. I like better the first inscription, "Head of an Unknown Woman."

She stands on your right as you enter, facing the distant head of Julius Cæsar through the length of that first half of the street. But she does not see him. She looks coquetting at one of

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the nearer emperors. She has not been sculptured in the purple. Her sculptor made her comely and a coquette. She has long ringlets, like our grandmothers, falling before her ears, and shorter ringlets in her neck. Her head is bowed a little and very prettily, so that she might look up from under her eyelids. Her eyes, I think, were meant to be laughing, but of this you cannot be sure.

For here time took up the chisel. He has struck off the end of her nose, and made rough furrows between her brows. He is a coarse and brutal workman, but his strokes have left such a whimsical gay look on that pretty face. You would not call it broken. The nose is now tilted, the brows are wrinkled, half in amusement half in a feigned doubt. It is a teasing face and almost ready to break into laughter. Beside it should be those two faces that stand now at the far end of the street, the serene nun's face of the Asiatic woman, with her peaked hood that comes down about her cheeks and swathes her chin, and the bent face and smoothed hair of Antonia, the head of meekness itself.

There are two other faces of women in that first part of the street which make you turn to look : the august and beautiful head of Crispina, and Domitia's face, with its quaint, high front of hair that looks like a sponge, and its tight lips.

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You would say, a quick woman and humorous, of a good heart and very voluble. So Miss Bates would have looked had she been a queen. This is the very portrait of Miss Bates, born out of humble circumstances.

But for goodness of heart you must go beyond the street of faces, into that room of miscellaneous things which lies at the entrance to the room of the Parthenon friezes, to that bust which is coldly labelled "archaic female head." It is a square and capable face, with a broad mouth, a jutting, rounded chin, and its sockets are empty. But it needs no eyes. Good humour and goodness of heart, an enveloping goodness, speak out of the very stone.

Before you have reached it and gone through that part of the street where the Greek faces are, you have passed by the little square which the satyr keeps filled with his laughter. There he stands with his pipes and his stick, his hair in a rumple and his chin up and his figure straightened to the laugh; the laugh sparkles off his face, with its dimples and its showing teeth, like sunlight off moving water.

It is a figure of untroubled gaiety of heart, the satyr without his wrinkles of impudent lust. Time has had his hand on this figure also, though not as a sculptor (what he broke off has been

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restored), but he has coloured it so cleverly that he has worked a change in character. It is an act, you might say, of acclimatising. The tip of that jollily tilted nose now twinkles out of the surrounding dirt. This spirit of southern woods has become, with its soiled and laughing face, the spirit of London streets. He is the very breath and character of the Cockney gamin. He might be Lamb's own chimney sweep.

“ There he stood, irremovable, as if the jest was to last for ever—with such a maximum of glee and minimum of mischief in his mirth, for the grin of a genuine sweep hath absolutely no malice in it—that I could have been content, if the honour of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and mockery till midnight.”

It is so, but with a modulation in his joy, that the faun laughs in that square in the middle of the street of faces.

CONCERNING TOPS.

In the quieter streets the top season has already begun. It is no doubt because the month has been mild that they are spinning more early than is customary. Theirs is a brief season, coming in that unsettled time when winter is past and spring not fully here, when men are divided between winter and summer games. That it should be so is another and more mysterious affair. There is no reason why tops should not be spun and whipped at all seasons. Yet even those not yet of an age to give thought to such things do unconsciously follow mysterious and arbitrary fashions.

I would make a distinction between your top whipped and your top spun. The first is an excellent pastime for the mildness of spring, but, with a little added vigour on the part of the executant, no less well suited to the frosty days.

CONCERNING TOPS.

Your top spun, or peg-top, since an indolence seems part of the style, might spin far into the summer without any incongruity between the game and season. One might whip from harvesting time till Easter, and spin for the rest of the year.

I would like justice to be done to the top. It is the only game that I know of with two styles nicely adjusted to the changes of the seasons. One may argue now about these its virtues. Yet for all that, the practice endures as it was. I do not remember ever to have spun or whipped a top except about the weeks just before Easter.

Of the two the peg-top is the more spectacular. It has the greater appearance of skill. It is as sudden as a spring shower. You see the indolent figure of a boy, his hand flies up like the flick of a snake fang, the top darts out of it, and then you see it gathered up, quietly spinning, on his palm. With the ferocity of that sudden fling, and then that quiet spinning in the hand, it is like a wild thing suddenly tamed. It is mysterious and flashing, like juggling or a conjuring trick. There is something very taking in that darting skill. And then, for the combative there was the sport of splitting tops, when you flung your spinning top on another, and, if you flung well, clove it to the peg. I do not know if the sport is still practised. It belonged to an earlier and more

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barbarous generation. But it must have needed great skill.

Yet for all the peg-top's virtues I would put the whipping-top before it. There is a greater virtuosity it is true in peg-top spinning, and the peg-top is the more beautiful. It is as dainty as a dancer. The whipping-top is of clumsy looks by comparison, and the most awkward fingers can learn in a little time to spin it. Not that there is no art in whipping. It needs judgment and a skilful hand. But the skill is concealed. It is not flashing and spectacular.

Skill apart, the whipping - top makes the finer game. It takes you on your travels, and that is better than to be spectacular, better than to startle the foot of the unwary with your peg-top's sudden dart, better even than combat and many victories. The whipping-top is the more romantic of the two. It is a game for solitude as well as company. You would, I think, tire of flinging a peg-top (with none to admire, and none to be startled) more quickly than driving a whipping-top, which you do for your own pleasure and without display. Your whipping-top is a vehicle in which imagination travels, and the mere pleasure of whipping and the anxieties of the game became tributary to a greater idea. So I found it.

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I very well remember my own two whipping-tops. There was one, the mushroom shape, with its long stem and its small flat top and its coloured rings, a very gay spinning thing, though not my favourite; the other was sturdy and squat, like a little tower, and was ringed to take the string if you spun it so (though it was very easy to spin with the fingers), and was of a bright yellow. Neither was beautiful as those airy, graceful, fine-toed peg-tops are, nor so sure on its spinning foot. But we went on our travels together.

Of that second top, the yellow, squat fellow, I was very fond. He was called "Leander"—not after the swimmer, of whom at that age I had never heard, but after the railway engine. (I wonder if Leander the engine still travels on the rails, or if he has long since this gone back to the sheds at Crewe?) Together "Leander" and I would spin tranquilly from station to station up and down the quiet asphalt pavements of that suburb in the spring sunshine. He would dash off, like a great buzzing golden bee, and curve perilously towards the gutter and spin in peace till I came up with him; and we would turn the corners cautiously and toil up the steep gradients. He was not the only engine on that system. There were others who spun and travelled with us, "Badajos," who was a dark red, and

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“Scorpion,” and “Sir Humphrey Davy.” Those were gay Easter Days, when the streets were a railroad and we went all about the kingdom.

You see in what the whipping-top was superior. The peg-top, for all her grace—I should make that distinction, giving her the feminine title by reason that she is a dancer, and the whipping-top the masculine—for all her grace remains a peg-top. But the whipping-top, because he travels, is not fixed in his own character. He may become a greater thing. To me all whipping-tops will always have something of the grandeur of a railway engine; and when I see those majestic creatures coming smoothly into a station I think of “Leander” spinning his curving, golden way along the street.

A WAR OFFICE WINDOW.

Perhaps it is written somewhere what was in the mind of the man who built the War Office, when he made its great corridors. It may be that he said to himself, looking out of one of its windows into Whitehall and across at the noble figures of the mounted guards on the other side of the street, "Those who go down this great street to war, in the sun and the wind and to the sounds of music, with men cheering and women watching them from the tall houses, will go so exalted that they will believe war to be in itself glorious and desirable, to be 'wooded like a mistress.' But those who direct war at home and go from room to room of this place with papers under their arms, shall never be allowed to forget that war is a dark and horrible thing." So he made those corridors what they are.

They are like the streets of a dark and hopeless

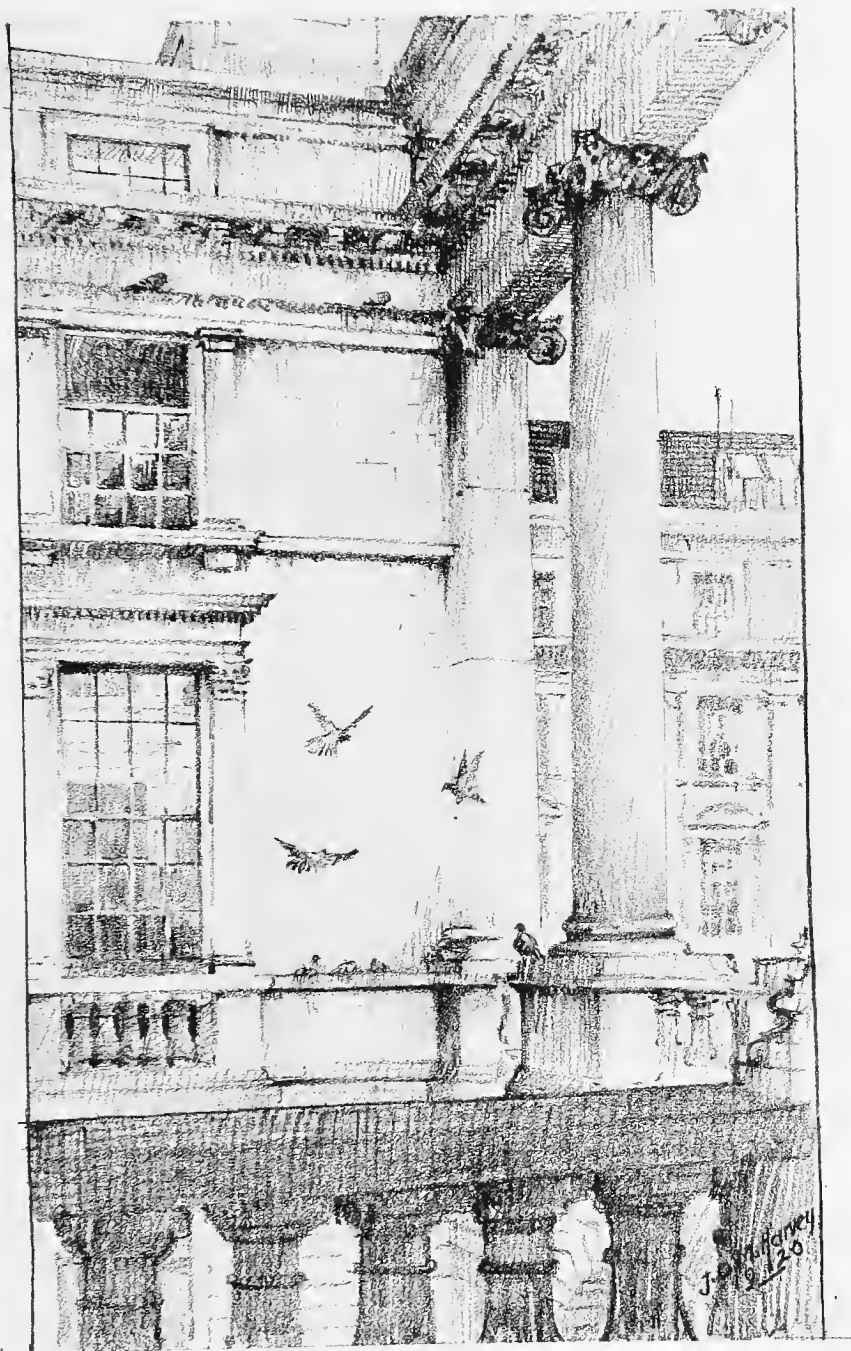
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town. They are gloomy by day; by night, when they seem to grow enormously long in the perspective of their dull yellow lamps, they are gloomier still. They are like streets always under repair, for tables stand by every other window with screens round them, for the overflow of the crowded rooms. They are like poor streets, for you look from them into little, dismal, sunless courts. They are cheerless and cold as winter streets, and hot gusts come from their radiators, like the sudden warm smells of kitchens rising from basement gratings.

They are unnamed streets. Strangers wander through them hopelessly lost, and when at last they escape into Whitehall sing aloud for joy to find themselves in the warm and habitable world again—if indeed they all escape. Some may still be there who, after many wanderings, have fallen exhausted in the lower basement, and in some dark corner have died undiscovered; have withered, crumbled, and mingled at last with the dust on the great piles of papers lying in that dark underworld.

They are worse than any streets, for no wind or rain ever blows through them, and the meanest streets have above them the beauty of chimneys and the sky.

By one of these corridors one came to the room



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with the unexpected window. Except when the old general burst into song, or spoke through his telephone in the voice of a man moving a battalion, the room was very still. Before the fire lay the general's gloves, that they might be well warmed when he should leave at seven o'clock. Behind the general's chair was a screen to protect him from the draught of the tall window which was open at the top. At four each winter afternoon the window was closed. In that room was comfort, order and stillness; and behind the screen was the unexpected window, cut off by it from the rest of the room as if it did indeed belong somewhere else. To come to it there, at the end of those long, repelling streets and across that room with its comfort and order of the precisian, was like coming suddenly, in the middle of London, to one of those little, ancient gardens which seem to grow with the years a deeper and more beautiful green.

The window was very tall, reaching almost from the ground to the ceiling of the high room. It looked across a little white court to another window exactly like itself, a window with a stone balustrade, a fluted pillar on either side, and above it a broad, ornamented architrave. There was another window below it, and above it window rose on window, each one a little smaller and plainer than the one beneath, until was reached

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the line of the roof that seemed to lift the sky very far away. But the little court was not dark, for on one side it was open, and from the window one looked between tall pillars into the greater court beyond, with a glimpse of a long row of distant windows, and above these also, the sky.

To this serene place the pigeons came, great grey and blue pigeons, and like people grown slow, plump and middled aged, they took their gentle promenade on the broad ledges which ran all round the little court beneath each window, or more adventurously (like the plump people leaving the road for a field path with stiles) they would hop in and out between the pillars of the balustrades. The only sound in the little court was their soft contented murmuring. It seemed like whispering voices from the stones themselves, breathing their pleasure when the sun warmed them or the wind blew in between the pillars.

Sometimes from far below came up a faint rumbling, and the pigeons would sit on their ledges, their heads on one side, as if they watched whatever it might be that was passing there. One would not have been surprised, looking down from the window, to see at the bottom of the little court a fountain where the pigeons drank, and stone-crop and mosses growing round it and a stone Pan dancing. But at the bottom was only a lift from

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the outer court, and the noises were of men wheeling trolleys in and out of the great basements with their dusty stacks of papers.

If indeed they are papers. The corridors of the upper storeys are like streets in a gloomy town, but these lowest corridors are like streets in an underworld of tombs. Perhaps the yellow piles that line them are not papers at all but the coffins of forgotten generals, those whom St. Paul's has not received; and if one opened them one would find each general lying there with his hands folded across a jacket of papers, a jacket containing all his papers arranged in their order, from his record at Sandhurst to the last secret report made against him; and on the outside of the jacket the names of all those through whose hands the papers had passed, each name neatly crossed out and dated with the day on which the jacket passed to another hand; and at the bottom of them all, and still waiting to be crossed out and dated with the date of the Day of Judgment, the name of the Recording Angel.

By day the pigeons would come in ones and twos to the little court and walk there, but towards evening they would all return to pass the night. Their bedroom was the ledge below the topmost window. They would sit in a row, grey, humped and still, and the dusk would come, turning the

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white stones to the same grey colour. So the pigeons disappeared and the lights would come out, suddenly opening the rooms which by day were hidden behind their dusty windows, and the little court would grow larger.

The room below, across the court, was full of strange lights and reflections and things half seen. Sometimes its only lamp was in the window, a lamp with a green shade, glowing vivid as an emerald, and a hand beneath it writing. Sometimes its only lamp was far back in the room where the little gleams of light fell on the unseen chairs and tables, like running water, while all the front of the room was filled with a grey reflection from across the little court, with the wavering shape of a window and ghostly hands moving dim papers, as if here still laboured the spirits of those who (it may be) sleep in the tomb-like streets beneath the War Office.

So the day would pass in the little court to the cooing of the pigeons. The day would pass and the pigeons settle to sleep; the window be shut and the lights come out; and by day and by dusk and by darkness all was still except when the General sang a bar or two turning over his files, or spoke in a voice of thunder through his telephone.

ON LEAD SOLDIERS.

When my own toy-box was closed down and passed up into the garret, I ceased, like other people, to follow the great fashions of toys. It is true that when I go into a toy-shop I forget my manners and behave with a freedom proper only among one's own possessions. But for all that I look at toys now only with the dim exterior eye. Nor should I trust my judgment in choosing them. I am retired. I no longer have a right to an opinion.

But there is one toy that I except from this abdication. I still look at lead soldiers with the eye of a commander. I like to know what recruits are added year by year to that great army, which is no mercenary force to be bought and sold, but, like the Cadmeian men, starts up from brown paper at the foot of a bed (as though out of the dragon's teeth) or among the dishes of the break-

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fast table (according as the family custom is), or from behind the smoke of coloured candles.

I look at a lead soldier as one would look at a little piece of statuary. I take him in hand and turn him about with the same pleasurable thrill. He is so trim and well-poised; he has the charm of all delicate small things. And then he enjoys this great advantage over other miniatures—that he is made in a mould and you can have as many of him as you like, and all the same. He is the one work of art of which it can be said that ten copies of him are exactly ten times better than the original. That is the advantage of being a soldier.

I do not see why we should ever put our lead regiments away. I can imagine no more cheerful and inspiriting decoration to a gentleman's room. 'A squadron of dragoons on your mantelpiece, a company of Highlanders going at a run across your desk, a grenadier with a gun raised in the shadow of each of your candlesticks, would give it an air of intent purpose not to be got out of more conventional ornaments. They would breathe action into its littered stillness, and touch its ease with a pleasant suspense.

There are a score of places in any room where lead soldiers could stand to advantage. The heights of a room are full of excitement and

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sudden surprises. (I could wish that I had known, when I still played on the open plain of the floor or the plateau of the table, what a glorious battlefield those lofty fastnesses would make. The tops of that level row of pictures have never held anything before except dust; but imagine a little army passing cautiously along the perilous ridge of them in single file!) You would live in a room perpetually on the eve of battle; and with a solitary horseman always immobile by your inkstand you would dip your pen continually in romance.

Who are the artists who design whole armies at a time as other men a new tunic or cap? It is a profession greatly to be envied. Imagine what it must be to open a box and look at a new regiment which is your own handiwork. But I do not know that I like all the later fashions and ingenuities. Lead soldiers are now made in all the attitudes. They kneel, they run, they lie down to fire, and they make a very vivacious picture of a battle set out in the shop. But I confess that I date from the old upright school. It was a soldier's duty then to stand at attention through everything.

There are tactical difficulties about the new fashions. How do you put the recumbent figures out of action? In the old school a man fought till he fell and then he was dead; that was the end

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of him, and a very good rule it was, and suitable to simple fighters. There were no subtleties about a battle. You came within range and you fought till one side had none standing. Then you counted your dead. There was, too, a real virtue in that single pose; it showed a great (though passive) contempt for all circumstances. Whether living or dead, upright or fallen, you stiffly maintained it.

I should like Hans Andersen's opinions on the new attitudes. You cannot imagine his Steadfast Tin Soldier going through all those adventures on his stomach. The thing is manifestly absurd. He is the type of the old school and its stoic virtues. And yet that Highlander whom I saw in a shop the other day, lying half out of the embrasure of a fort and firing down into the courtyard below, was a magnificent and reckless figure. A regiment of such men could lie along the tops of those level picture-frames (it is the very place for them) and sweep the whole mantelpiece with a cross fire.

The mantelpiece, except for its candlesticks, is an exposed position. Its great merit (you may care to know) is that it has a mirror at the back, so that the cabinet across the way is under the perpetual belief that it is held by twice as many men as is in fact the case. It is a simple device

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for deceiving the enemy, which, so far as I know, has not occurred to other generals. Yes, these newer fashions are not to be despised. That hothead Highlander (a very little and he would have pitched a hundred feet below, so eager was he to fire) has won me over. But I would have no diversity within my regiments. Let all the men of each regiment be in one attitude, standing at attention, running or lying to fire. Their grandeur is in their precise discipline.

That Highlander, like Hazlitt's daisy, leapt to my heart, and so, too, did a regiment of a sort that was new to me. Regiment, indeed, is not the word, being too modern. It was a body of men in armour, swords raised, shields with painted devices, knees stealthily bent as they advanced. The whole pose of them was perfect. Why have we waited so long for men in armour? They should have taken precedence of the savage tribes, which were long since added to the army, and which I for one did not greatly welcome. Not that I have any colour prejudice; I recollect my Bengal Lancers for as a fine a regiment as ever stepped out of a red box. But men in armour are noble recruits. For all table fighting is mediæval.

You come within short cannon range and fight in close order; and that rule that you fought till

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you fell and then were out of the battle comes straight from mediæval practice. It belongs to the time when the man in armour, once on his back, whether wounded or not, was as good as dead till he was picked up again. Your lead army is always a mediæval force. "Then they all issued out of the town, and were in number twelve hundred men of arms. . . . Then the Scots came, and lodged against them near together. Then every man was set in order of battle. Then the queen came among her men, and there was ordained four battles; then the archers began to shoot on both parties, but the shot of the Scots endured but a short space. But there was not one left alive, but all lay dead on heaps." That is how your armies of the table fight.

I hope this fashion of recruiting from the past will endure. There are archers and crossbowmen and men-at-arms still to be made, and mounted knights; and where are the Roman legionaries? Why have they never been cast? They would make very noble figures in lead. Indeed, why not all the ages?

In his Ballad of the White Horse Mr. Chesterton had his Saxon and Celt and Roman fighting side by side against the pagan Dane. "Poetry," said he boldly (or words to that

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effect), “ can telescope history.” So in your table battles all the ages as well as all the nations can meet when the armies are set out, about the time of the day that Castilians and Portugalois joined battle at Juberother. “ The same Saturday was a fair day, and the sun was towards evensong. Then the first battle came before Juberother.”

PIERRE LOTI AND KENSINGTON GARDENS.

It is a far cry from the Bay of Nagasaki in "La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune" or the domes and pinnacles of Stamboul in "Les Désenchantées" to Kensington Gardens. But that is one of the joys of books—if only you read them in the wrong place—that they can mix the world for you into countries as odd and inconsequential, and yet as real, as any country of dreams.

I read Pierre Loti on long, lazy summer afternoons, sitting under the trees in Kensington Gardens, looking down the broad avenue from the Round Pond to the Serpentine and far up the sweep of the turf on the other side to the hidden road where the cars would slip along like the little figures drawn across the back of a shooting range



LOTI IN KENSINGTON.

at a fair. And so those summer afternoons, and those deep-browed, respectable, unshaken trees, and that grass which is more English than anything else, are all oddly and improperly mixed in my mind with the loves and the partings, the storms and the sunsets and the mists, all the vast and brooding sadness of Pierre Loti. If ever in a dream I were to go sailing on the Serpentine I think I should come in the end to the Golden Horn on an autumn evening or to some strange and melancholy waste of Pacific Seas. For the same reason there is for me a Warwickshire orchard all in bloom on the haunted moors of "Wuthering Heights;" and the "road by Merrow Down" wanders into Cumberland hills; and all the journey of the "Inland Voyage" is lit by the glow of a winter fire at tea-time.

All the books that move one strongly gather up into their pages and keep there some time or place of one's own that does not belong to them—odd and trivial things many of them, but the more trivial they are the more beautiful it is that they have not been forgotten. We could very well spare half the literary criticisms that are written, but there is one essay which every man with an honest enthusiasm for books might write and every other man might read with interest and respect. It is a mere list of the books he had read

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and the memories of his own past that inhabited them—these odd, unexpected reflections of his life thrown into the midst of their scenes like the reflection of a fire which windows sometimes throw into the garden outside.

STREET SIGNS.

Most of the shops of London are hidden by their names. There is a gilt name on the fascia, there are notices on the door posts; white letters cover their windows, great gilt letters sprawl across the face of all their upper storeys. It is this thing that gives a mean look to our streets. All the form of their buildings is lost. The streets seem composed not solidly of houses, but of a multitude of flippant things, of goods in the shop windows, and of names and names and names. I make no objection to advertisement; but this advertisement under pretence of directing me is an ugly trick. A coloured hoarding is a more beautiful and a more honest thing than one of these unhappy clamant houses. The shopkeeper who scrawls his name all across a building is worse than the little boy who scribbles on a wall. He does coolly, and for a purpose, what the other does out of mere

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idleness of spirit. You will admit (if you will free your mind for a moment from the influence of familiarity with it), that it is a barbarous and most clumsy custom to write on buildings.

It is neither beautiful nor has it any sound argument of utility to defend it. Why should we not return to the older custom of projecting signs? There are already many in the streets; far more, as you will find when you come to look for them, than you would have supposed. But at present they are only an addition, an emphasis to the gilt names. If you will walk for half a mile with an eye to the signs you will see their great advantage; you will realise how little is to be said for the present fashion. The sign is seen more readily; it is more quickly and more naturally read, for it faces you as you walk. It is an ironic fact that with all this present display of gilt letters you often have to look some time before you can find the name of a shop. It defeats its own intention by its profusion and excess. It is actually too large to be read. But a sign standing out above the doorway is not to be mistaken. It performs its office better; it does not interfere with the good appearance of the building, and in itself it can be a very beautiful thing.

There are two sorts of signs : the painted board

STREET SIGNS.

and the golden symbol. Of these latter there are still a few to be seen. The pawnbroker has his three balls; the umbrella maker does occasionally hang out a golden umbrella, and there is a fine golden fishing rod in Knightsbridge.

These are the familiar signs, but in the smaller streets there are many more. In a twenty minutes' ride through Islington I saw a gilt lock, spitted on a gilt arrow, a gilt lyre above a piano tuner's rooms, three jars above a dye works, two most elegant gilt hams above ham and beef shops, and a gilt tea pot of magnificent proportions above a very small grocer's. The barbers' poles were almost beyond counting, but no longer are they hung as they once were, with brass bowls.

The true sign, like all these, must be a symbol. It must not be an advertisement. That is understood. If it becomes an advertisement the last state of the streets would be worse than the first.

The old signs did not escape the critics. The "Spectator," in one of his earliest numbers, attacked the signboards of his day for their absurdities, for their blue boars, black swans (there the sign-painter may now have his laugh of the "Spectator"), and red lions. "My first task," said he, "should be, like that of Hercules, to clean the streets of these monsters." These

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are faults to which we can feel tolerant. A red lion, or for that matter a parti-coloured lion (being at least a work of imagination) is better than a name in gilt letters 12 feet high. Any fool can shout his name. I do not doubt that the "Spectator" would have been even more severe on the fashion of to-day.

But if we revived signs, we should not revive much of their symbolism. It served its purposes when few people could read. Nor is it suited to the modern methods of retail. You may represent the watchmaker or the baker by symbols as clear as any writing. But what of the great stores? Only the Futurists would dare to attempt to express all their activities on a single sign. But we could be content with signboards painted simply with a name. For the chief beauty of the old signs was not in their painting, but in the fine iron frames on which they hung. A street of such signs would be beautiful even if they had no more than Mr. Jones, Butcher, or Mr. Smith, Candlestickmaker, painted on them.

I do not flatter myself that if we returned to signs we should by that simple act put an end to advertising and ugly giant display in the streets. The history of signs themselves contradicts the hope. Traders competed for notice by the extravagant size of their signs six centuries ago,

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as they do by the size of their gilt letters to-day. They went so far beyond the bounds of good sense and convenience that they had to be restrained. In Edward III's reign men on horseback could hardly ride down Cheapside for the size of the tavern signs. Charles II. legislated to prevent the same extravagances. In Paris of that time pearls as large as hogsheads, and feathers reaching to the third storey were seen on the shops. There were so many of these monstrous things that the streets were kept close and airless in their shadow. At their worst the signs were even unsafe. The weight of their ironwork would sometimes drag out the front of the light houses of timber and plaster. They swung ponderously in the wind, and filled the streets with their creaking noises. They dripped water when it rained. In the end their greedy excesses of display destroyed them. Four people were killed by the fall of a single sign in Fleet Street. The public began to look on them as dangerous, unnecessary things. They were condemned. Some disappeared; others were rehung flat against the buildings, and began the modern fashion.

So, in the middle of the eighteenth century the hanging signs went out. Since then, the reason for their disappearance has itself disappeared. We could revive them in our wider streets and on

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our more massive buildings of stone without fear that they would take our lives, or even our fresh air.

I would not have the innocent suffer, but sometimes as I walk through our lettered streets and think of the old houses and remember how it was that the old signs came to an end, I am tempted to wish that the sprawling gilt name across the windows of Messrs. So and So, or one of those huge white letters that cover all the face of the building of Such and Such a Company, would fall on the head of the managing director.

SUBURBAN NAMES.

There is only one thing in the poor suburbs that is worth looking at, and that is the names of the houses. Everyone must have observed that small houses always have extravagant or famous, or grandiose names. The house is extinguished by the name. You look at it as you would look at a very small boy in a very large hat. It is by the names of their houses that the very humble and the very aristocratic meet. A mere wealthy commoner is content to be known as residing at 127A, in some street in the West-end of London. But Lord Lansdowne and Mr. John Smith of Bermondsey both live in Lansdowne House; and it would probably surprise the King to know how many of his poorer subjects reside in a villa, a terrace, a cottage, or merely a "view" called Balmoral. The coarser commercial humours of house-naming have been much exploited at the

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seaside, where the names of lodging-houses are merely false advertisements. They are chosen deliberately to suggest that the house is what it is not.

But you cannot explain the great names of small streets in any such obvious way. If their little and dull houses have fine names it can only be for the much more cheerful reason that people like fine names. If a landlord calls a five-room red-brick villa with ten square feet of garden and a railway at the bottom of it "Windsor Cottage" or "Mountain Prospect," it is not that any tenant will be deceived into thinking that the one has even a distant resemblance to Windsor Castle, or that from the windows of the other he will look out on anything except a similar cottage over the way, but that he likes a good name and likes to be reminded of fine things. You have no right to despise a man for this, and even less to pity him. If he is really the happier for it, if he finds the rooms more spacious because the name on the outside is spacious, he deserves your envy and admiration. It really is a very innocent and proper pleasure, this pleasure in calling a little house after a great house, and in feeling that your house is the better for a fine name, and in taking a pride over your neighbour because you live in "Balmoral" and he only in "Acacia View,"

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though your two houses are identical from the skylight to the kitchen sink. This is to use words in a good and encouraging way, and to understand the value of allusion.

But you will, of course, observe that what is a virtue in the very poor is mean and pompous among the well-to-do; that what is a fine allusion in the one is a very weak affectation and conceit in the other. Windsor Cottage must not only be unlike Windsor Castle, but fantastically unlike it if you are to tolerate the name. When you see a well-to-do house that has borrowed a very great name you are moved to an irritation that you might not find it very easy to explain. It is not that you are deceived by it; but you feel at the back of your mind that there was a vague intent to deceive. You know that it is the work of someone setting up to be something greater than he is, and doing it in such a way that none but a very poor fool would be taken in by the trick. He has borrowed a great name in the hope that you may in some way associate him with its legitimate owner. You feel, indeed, a little of what you feel when you meet a foreigner who has appropriated an old English name, and expects to be taken for an Englishman in consequence. You are doubly annoyed. You are annoyed at the impudence, and you are annoyed at the stupidity

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of the thing. The frog who blew and blew himself out until he burst in the hope of becoming as big as the cow was really an heroic figure. He perished for an ideal. But if he had blown himself out no more than he could do with comfort, and then gone about calling himself a cow, you would have been glad to kick him into the ditch.

Who are they who name these little suburban houses, and what emotion have they at the back of their minds when they do it? Does each builder do it for his own houses, and draw up a list over his supper table with the help of his wife, as any man might, or is it a profession to which men give themselves up entirely? And on what plan and principle do they work? Have they anything to determine their choice but a fondness for great names? Do they do it sentimentally or whimsically or contemptuously or ironically or bitterly? Is it the name that attracts them most or its ill-proportion to the cottage? Do they make so free with the houses of the great because they admire them or because they hate them? How and why is it done?

There is one row of little houses in a large town where you may see their godfather's mind openly at work. He did not fling big names about but went on a settled plan. He decided that the cottages should be named after great racehorses,

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and so there was an "Eclipse Villa" and a "Persimmon Villa" and a "Minoru Villa" and so forth, all very high-sounding and delightful. And then he came to Ladas, and being a little weary of horses digressed to owners, and so after "Ladas Villa" came "Rosebery Villa." But as he hovered over the next he remembered that the owner of Ladas was not famous only on the course, and after "Rosebery Villa" came "Chamberlain Villa," and then "Salisbury Villa," and then "Gladstone Villa;" and there they stand to this day, the great racehorses and the politicians, held together as they were in that man's mind by the versatility of Lord Rosebery. But it is not all rows of suburban houses that are done on so clear a plan, and you can say no more than that they were named by someone who liked a great word and thought that a little and poor place would be the better for being called by it. You pass by rows and rows of grey and unbeautiful houses, with the same height, the same plan, the same windows, the same evil-looking paint; but each has a grandiose or a famous or an extravagant name. And the meanness and monotony of the street are swallowed up in laughter.

GRANDMOTHER.

I remember her with her silver curls hanging on her cheeks, a short square figure going with little firm steps; her umbrella she held well before her, tap-tapping on the road. She lived in a house that was modern and not large, and stood close on a small road with a high hedge of holly that kept the eyes of passers-by from looking through the dining-room windows. It was a house like many others in the quieter suburbs of a large town. And yet it had to our childish romantic eyes something of a strange air. It seemed not at all like our own house which stood no further than round the next corner from it. It was sombre. It seemed to us to belong to a darker and earlier time. It was such a house as a grandmother would live in.

This was in part no more than that it was a house villainously ill built, with a square hall

GRANDMOTHER.

ingeniously placed so that it got none but borrowed light, and at the height of the day was always dark, and with a very long passage that led from the kitchen to the scullery and must have been a continual discontent to servants. But to us these things were natural and proper parts of a grandmother's house.

And then there was her own room, and in it the great canopied feather bed, and the strange ornaments, and old rings on the dressing table, and the black profiles with the dainty curls of the women in pale gold, and the photographs of men in very high collars and curious great cravats that grandmother would tell us were her own brothers. All these things were strange, and in that room we were very far away from a modern suburb and our own life. Over the door of the dining-room there hung an oil painting of Oliver Cromwell, and that of itself seemed to me, as a child, to make the house very old and distant, altogether of another time.

It was in this house that grandmother ruled, and when we visited it she would carve the joint herself; not even her own sons would have dared offer to take this duty from her. There were certain things that we ate in her house: cakes of her own baking and other dainties, which were given to us nowhere else, so that they were a part

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of her to us and not to be separated from our conception of a grandmother. Crumpets and Yarmouth bloater paste, in squat stone jars with round tops that gripped the rim of the jar with three curved metal fingers—these will always be associates of grandmother's to me. So much were these things a part of her that when we carried invitations to her to take tea with us we would add on our own authority that she should bring them with her.

Nor was that the only pleasant topsy-turvy custom permitted between youth and age. On her birthday she would give instead of receiving presents. It was a custom which we thought very pretty and sensible. In all that we did in that sombre house of hers, in the eating, and the old-fashioned games we played, as in the dark furniture and high collars and cravats of the photographs, there was a flavour of stiffness, pleasant to us by the change from the more familiar ways of our own home; it was very right in a grandmother's house, and belonged to great age and corkscrew curls.

Grandmother was a housewife of eighty years ago, and made her own pastry. It was a very pleasant thing, when we visited her of a morning, to find her in the kitchen, her hands all powdered with flour, as she bent her silver curls over a rolling

GRANDMOTHER.

pin, and to watch the oven doors open and smell the sweet warm smell that came out of them, and to have little bits of hot brown pastry slipped into our mouths.

With her pastry-making grandmother kept another custom of her distant youth, a custom long since fallen into disrepute. She punned. Even at a great age she was still the wit of her family. She was an adept at this innocent pastime and at other games of the sort. She would tell us how, when she and her brothers and sisters were young, they would all sit in the family circle and cap verses; and it seemed to us, who still liked toys and would rather push a row of books along the carpet than read them, a very strange game, but again just such a game as a grandmother would play.

She had many stories, and as time went on and she grew less sprightly and punned less and lived outside the general life round her and was most often in the past, it happened only now and then that the conversation, as it turned, would touch the still wheel of her memory and set it moving for a little; and we could guess, before she began to speak, at what point her memory had come in contact with our talk, and which of her tales she would tell.

There was that tale of her father, who lived on

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the East Coast in those troubled times when men went to bed at night expecting to be waked with the news that Bonaparte had landed, and kept their goods and furniture ready packed in carts to move inland, and who, when he went out to court her mother (why do we never go courting in these present days?) would dress as a woman for fear of being seized by the pressgang. That was, of all stories, the most vivid to us, and made us feel that grandmother had come from another world. And there was the story of how, as a girl, living in the square of that little East Coast town, she would watch the London coaches setting out from the inn across the way. It must have been her clear recollections of those times that made her tell the story of the Family Coach (which was the favourite of all the games that we played together at her house) with such gusto and dramatic power; so that to be any part in that great journey, even the coachman's whip or the linch pin, was like acting in a play.

There was a third custom of her earlier days that she had not forgotten. As we held the door for her when she left the room she would curtsy, with a smile and half in fun, as to say "I know you think it old-fashioned, and so it is, but this is how we used to do it." Even, when in time, she could walk only with an arm to support her as

GRANDMOTHER.

well as her stick, and tottered and bent to her steps, she would not forget that custom. In a brief pause at the doorway and a gentle bend of the head, which was all that she now could do, we saw the faint pathetic ghost of that old and sweeping ceremony.

THE SMALLEST HOUSE IN THE WORLD.

There is a house in the middle of London which must certainly be the smallest house in the world. It is smaller than the smallest grey cottage in the Cumberland hills; smaller than the little shuttered bungalow on the Sussex Cliffs where only the dead lie; smaller than any house outside a fairy tale. Moreover, it has three storeys; and it is built of brick; and a man sells tobacco there; and his name is Smith. It is a true house of London.

There are many small houses in London. There are houses delightfully small on Campden Hill and country cottages off Knightsbridge. There is a house in Wellington Road, St. John's Wood, very square and very white, with four windows and one door and two chimneys, the very model of all the houses that everyone has drawn before he



J.P. Morley
1912

THE SMALLEST HOUSE.

is five. Moreover the houses of Downing Street are amazingly small to every stranger who comes to London, and there is the delectable cottage of the pond of the water fowls in St. James's Park which, beyond doubt, in the days when London was paved with gold, was the sugar cottage of Hansel and Gretel. But none of these is as small as the house where Mr. Smith sells tobacco.

From the days of the Arabian Nights to the days of Mr. Wells and Lord Dunsany, to the tale of the Magic Shop and the tale of the Bureau de Change de Maux, writers have played with the idea of mysterious houses which you enter to find strange adventures; and then when you pass that way again they have disappeared. Mr. Smith's tobacco shop is one of these and yet it has none of the common attributes of mystery and is as far removed as could be from all Wardour Street touches of romance. Its bricks are the deep, delightful red of the old German boxes of bricks. It is as fresh as a newly painted doll's house. Its door is of the shape of other doors. The tobaccos in its window—for there is one window on each storey—are no strange narcotics, but the tobaccos, good and bad, that all Englishmen smoke. It is a house of the most simple and open face, and yet I never pass it without looking to see if it is still there. Nor shall I ever be

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surprised to find one day that it has gone. It only just misses being a toy house with a front and nothing else, for it is built in a little angle made by the walls of two other houses, and though you can just go into it yet it gets smaller and smaller as you go in. If one night it were to disappear it would leave no place where a house should have been. If ever a house was built for the mere fun of building a little house, it is this house where Mr. Smith sells tobacco.

There it stands among enormous, florid buildings in the busiest part of London, the neatest, jolliest little coloured house that was ever built. I should never be surprised to see one of the hawkers of penny toys at Charing Cross offering just such a house for sale.

DISCOVERING HOUSES.

It is in the spring that you discover how few houses there are in London. There are streets, there are doors, there are chimneys, there are rows upon rows upon rows of windows, there are all those parts of which a house is made; but there are hardly any houses. In some mysterious way the houses are there, yet they have disappeared.

If you will call up your memories of London streets you will find them full of clear and strong images of the streets themselves, but when you cease to think of the streets and divide your memory of them you go at once to the great confusion of its details, its traffic, and the goods shown in its shops. You pass the houses by; its shops you remember only as rows of windows and gilt names. There are no houses to them. In all our streets the houses are hardly seen. Take any street you will, with which you are familiar, by

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which you travel every day, and recall its houses—if you can. You will remember the character of the street, that thing in it which distinguishes it from all others but which you will not be able to put into words, and you will remember what you have seen in its windows. But its houses you will not remember.

It is in the spring that you realise how little you know of London houses, and how lost they are in their own streets. For it is in the spring that you discover them. Hidden by their own windows, and in their modest uniform of dirt, they stand unnoticed all the rest of the year.

Then in the spring one here and there will suddenly put off its uniform, step forth out of its modesty, and, for the first time since it was built, be seen as a house. It will be cleaned. Cleanliness in a London house is more startling than any architectural eccentricity. The men who steam the bricks and paint the stucco, swinging in their cradles, are the real architects of London. It is they who make a house to be seen. Under their hands it shakes off the touch of its fellows, comes out of the dim line, and is known as a house.

You see that it is complete and count its storeys; if it is a shop you look with surprise, and find that there is more to it than its windows; that there is a building to it and a roof above and chimneys;

DISCOVERING HOUSES.

that all these smaller things belong to one another and make up one whole thing; that it has a beginning and an end; that it is different from those others which stand on either side; that it could exist without them; that it is, in fact, a house; and if you will be honest with yourself you will confess that you had never thought of it as a house before.

A shop may be a poor sort of house; it is a house that is half a street, it has none of the attributes which make a house dear to you; but nevertheless it is a house, and that is a fact which it is well on occasion to remember. I have called the cleaners and painters the real architects, for they make houses appear in our streets. But they do more. Theirs is almost a holy office. They undo that work which the old Hebrews cursed; they restore landmarks; for where you see the line of paint or the ending of the clean red brick there you know a wall is hidden that is much more important than any of the walls you see, because it has neither doors nor windows. It is the wall that divides one house from another. It may be higher than mountains and more deep than continents. Yet if it were not for the painter in spring, you would not know, through half the streets in London, that the wall was there.

I do not doubt that many people go discovering

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houses as I do, and find it a very inspiriting pursuit. For the first time, the other day, I discovered in Piccadilly, near by Burlington Arcade, a pleasant house of red brick that I had passed a thousand times before and never seen. It had been cleaned. And a shop in Oxford Street that till now has been a row of windows to me has suddenly become a building. It has been painted. These houses grow up in a night, and though I do not profess to that amazement and delight which the King felt when he looked forth from his windows in the morning and, in what had been an empty field at sunset, saw a glittering and jewelled palace, yet in a more sober tone and without amazement I feel something of the same pleasure.

These fairy works of the painters only endure a little time. They are unsubstantial things. Very soon the house of red brick will have faded back into Piccadilly, and I shall not see it as I pass; the white building in Oxford Street will become a row of windows again. The houses that have been will disappear and be lost once more in their own streets. For London houses come and pass like the flowers of spring.

THE GARBLING OFFICE.

One afternoon, turning the pages of the brass bound, leather-handled volumes of the great catalogue of the British Museum, I found the Garbling Office.

One could not come suddenly on that name and look no further. It was mysterious. It was exciting. Where was this office? What was it? Did it still exist? There are things in London that no one has ever found. Was I perhaps to make some great political discovery? Was this the explanation of——?

In the end, when I had read through an old pamphlet and five or six broad sheets and a few pages of the Journals of the House of Commons for the reign of James II., I had found—a tragedy. This is the story.

It is the story of the adventures of a word. It is a sad story, for some centuries ago, through

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no fault of its own, the word went to the bad. It is the story of the word Garble. If ever anyone had the right to say, out of bitter experience, that in this sinful world there is no real distinction between white and black, it is this unhappy word.

It has an honourable though not distinguished ancestry. It came to England, if not with the Conqueror, at least in the earliest days of the English language. It came from Italy, of the family of Garbellare. Still earlier it had crossed to Italy from Arabia from Ghirbal, a sieve, but whence it had come to Arabia, for it was not native to that country, and whether in going to Italy it did but return to the home of a Latin ancestor Cribellum, the learned are in doubt. Whichever it was its ancestry is not to be despised. It comes from the soil, and through many centuries the descent is clear.

By the time it reached England the word had got on in the world. It had risen to the honourable and beautiful meaning "to purify." Such was the meaning that it had in England in the fourteenth century. It had been engaged in trade in the Mediterranean, and as a trader it came to England. This was its undoing. Yet its connection with trade was of an official, and, one would have said, even of a distinguished kind.

In the reign of Henry VI. a Garbling Office was

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set up under the Mayor and City of London. Its business was to cleanse all spices that were imported, to grade them and to seal them—as is still done at London Docks in the room of the bags of cloves and nutmegs and the bales of cinnamon.

It was here, in the City, that Garble, still meaning to purify, fell into bad company. The Garbler used his purifying office corruptly. He garbled to his own illegal profits. He mixed his spices, instead of separating them. He put sometimes the good on top (as do sellers of baskets of strawberries to this day) and sometimes the bad, then sealed the whole bag as of one quality, so that he could benefit the merchant who sold or the retailer who bought, whichever it was that paid him the bigger bribe.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the grocers of London addressed the Lord Mayor on the subject. They addressed him in a learned and ornate pamphlet, asking that the practice of garbling might itself be garbled. They quoted Musæus; they prefaced the pamphlet with an essay on Roman respect for law; they told a story of “divers citizens of Rome who were disfranchised for breathing and yawning a little too loud in the presence of the Censor;” they began their indictment with the swelling words “For so much as everything has its natural, proper and inward

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corruption——.” Then they went on to talk of nutmegs.

What happened then I did not discover. Perhaps the Mayor was moved to action by the quotation from Musæus. Perhaps the Garbler himself was shamed into rectitude by the story of the citizens who breathed too loud. Whichever it was, Garble still meant to purify, though now it was itself a little soiled.

Two more centuries passed, and once more the unhappy word was involved in the exposure of corrupt practices. We are now in the reign of William III. Here we touch on the discontents of the Turkey Merchants.

By this time The Garbler—his name was Mr. William Stewart—had ceased to be a servant of the city of London. He had bought from the Mayor the right to garble and to collect for himself the fees for doing it. The Turkey merchants published several broadsheets, attacking him for his tyranny and extortion. Mr. Stewart replied. The dispute came at last before the House of Commons. But the House was busy raising money for the War with France. It was not for another twelve years that it gave its decision, and then it took from the Garbling Office all its compulsory powers and penalties. The Turkey merchants were satisfied, but the

THE GARBLING OFFICE.

Mayor with his Common Council, and Mr. William Stewart, both claimed compensation; the first because they had now no business to sell, the second because he had bought what was now taken from him. What is more both claims were admitted. Mr. Stewart received the exact sum that he had paid. As a man against whom the charges were proved he had no cause to complain. Nor, for that matter, had the Mayor and the City of London, who had sold their work to another to do and now were compensated for their neglect.

Thus magnanimously did the House of Commons try to satisfy everyone. But no one thought of the honourable name under which corruption had been practised. So, in the end, it is the innocent only that has suffered.

Mr. William Stewart and the Mayor of that day and his Common Council and the Turkey Merchants have been in their graves these two hundred years, but garble lives on, dishonoured, meaning no longer to sift in order to purify but to sift in order to corrupt.

Those last attacks on the office of Garbling by the Turkey Merchants lasted for fifteen years, and in the middle of the dispute John Locke wrote in his Essay on Toleration: "To Garble thus the truths of Religion and by their own authority take some not necessary to salvation."

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That would appear to be the first use in any famous work of the word in its modern sense, and now it has been corrupted beyond any hope of being itself garbled and made clean again. It must think very sadly of the high estate and meaning to which once it rose. It must envy even that humble peasant ancestor in Arabia and Italy, the sieve. For now it is never in any man's mouth except in contempt and disgust.

FUNERAL GAMES.

In any English country churchyard you know it is true that

The ways of death are soothing and serene,
And all the words of death are grave and sweet.

It is the great cemeteries of the towns, enormous crowded tenements of the dead, that deny it. Yet there is one small cemetery in London hidden away at the back of things which is as "soothing and serene" as any country churchyard. All about it are dull and dismal streets, with houses that were once prosperous but now have fallen into unostentatious poverty. In the middle of such a quarter lies this cemetery. It has a habitable and even cheerful air. It is more lively than the houses of the living which surround it.

Just inside, its path is broad and is permanently given over to the game of hop scotch. The ground

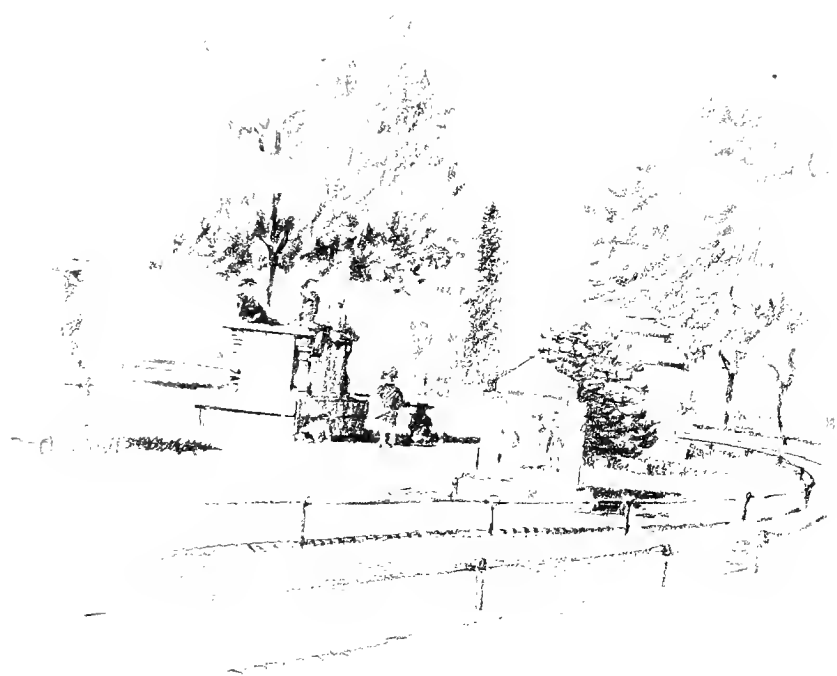
THE STREET OF FACES.

is marked out and intricately numbered, and a visitor is as likely as not to be stopped and asked to try his foot at the game before he goes further. In this way he is introduced at once to the spirit of the place. Inside on a broad tombstone tea is laid. Children sit upon it eating bread and butter, and as they eat kick their heels against the ancient, sonorous description of the virtues of whoever it may be who lies below.

Many of the smaller headstones have been moved away and lean in a row against the wall, while the great, grey tombs that still remain stand on the lawns and under the trees with the air rather of statues put there to give a classical and grave touch to the decoration of the garden.

Some of the tombs, and one tall obelisk, are covered with creepers, completely and beautifully covered, so that no sight of their stones is left but only their shape beneath the leaves. Others are still naked stone, weather worn and grey. But whether it is the good or the bad that thus have had their tombs made fertile no one can tell.

In one corner of the cemetery is a small cottage where the gravedigger lived and in his spare time built himself an elaborate approach to his home out of pieces of old tombs. Close beside the cottage is a mortuary and behind this a sign pointing down an alley to an anatomy school. But



10.11.11

FUNERAL GAMES.

these ghoulish things the cemetery has long since forgotten. Its dead lie undisturbed beneath the games and tea parties. This cemetery has become the garden of its quarter as every cemetery might well become when its last grave has been filled and its dead have grown so old that there is no cause to sorrow for them.

You need not call it irreverent. I do not think so badly of the Lord Protector Richard Cromwell's daughter (her tomb it was where tea was laid) as to suppose that she would feel anything but pleasure knowing that London children, centuries after her, should eat their bread and butter and kick their heels above her grave.

Say if you will that in this place the funeral games for the dead are still played every afternoon, though the dead were buried there so long ago.

ON RIDING DOWN PICCADILLY.

To ride down Piccadilly on horseback must be the most romantic thing in the world. Whatever you may mean by romance, that would still remain the most romantic thing to do, whether you are a mere swaggering romantic, wanting to be admired, or a romantic searching always for something more beautiful than you can ever find.

It goes to the heads of us all at times, the boyish, sweet-tasting, pagan desire for a triumph, to be a noble and heroic figure, come from great deeds, to receive the applause of men and women.

In such moments I think of Piccadilly on a clear April morning when the Green Park is beginning to be green. I would not choose for my reward, if I were such a man, to be buried in St. Paul's or to be remembered in songs; I would choose only to ride down Piccadilly once before I died, while

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men and women shouted at me—to ride from the beginning of the Green Park to Hyde Park Corner. For where the Green Park begins I should look all down the street, as it falls to the little valley that once was Tyburn Brook, and rises again up the other slope; so that the whole street would be before me and I should see the clean sanded path by which I was to ride, and on either side of it the crowds all waiting and watching for me to come. I should pause a moment, as I came from between the narrow houses, to take it all in. I should pause there with the great, green park below me on the left, and on the right the grey and solemn houses filled with faces; and between them I should see the road falling away from my horse's feet and all the dark crowd of waiting people suddenly become white as they turned their faces towards me—I should see all my triumphal road from its beginning to its end, and then, with the cheering in my ears, I should ride to Hyde Park Corner.

After that my day would be done. I should ask no more. You could do with me as you would. You could take me to Golders Green and there burn me to ashes. You could put me in a train and send me to Scotland to be buried (and hell itself sounds less horrible) in the Glasgow Necropolis. To me it would not matter. I should

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have had my day. I should have been exalted.

* * * * *

At the corner of Piccadilly where the Green Park begins will always be a gateway to romance. I tire very soon of the dream of riding that way on an April morning to be seen and cheered, but I never tire of the dream of riding through it, unseen and unheard, on a clear November evening in that brief time when the day has left the earth but night has not yet come to cover it, and by the little rift between the two one might suddenly escape.

On such an evening I feel how godlike a thing it is for a man to walk westwards to his home. For then Piccadilly from the Circus to the Green Park is like a narrow enchanted valley flaming and smoking with the sunset and the autumn mists, and you come to the corner by the Green Park and pass out as through an invisible gate. Thence onwards Piccadilly cannot change. Its old houses may go, and taller and taller hotels be built in their place, but even these will not be able to take from it its romance. Nothing will do that until someone fills in the little valley of the Tyburn Brook. So long as that dip in the road remains it does not matter what houses are built along the north side of the street. Here the growing, changing immensity of London suddenly

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ceases to be. Coming through that invisible gate you will always look across the trees of the park to the benign towers of Westminster, as to another and distant town. You will always see the sun set behind St. George's Hospital, or whatever building shall take its place, as behind a small, dark hill. You will always feel that Apsley House is what it was a hundred years ago—No. 1, London. For you will see with your own eyes that beyond it is nothing but the departing sun. Though London stretch some day as far westward as Reading it will always end at Hyde Park Corner on an autumn evening.

If I were to ride that way, unseen by all the traffic, I should ride from the Circus to the Green Park in the flame and smoke of the sunset, wondering what I should find at the end; and from the corner of the Green Park I should go very slowly down the slope, reining my horse in, and looking to either side at the trees and the dark houses with the mist about them as if it were melting out of their stones. Across Hyde Park I should go at a canter to meet whatever might come. At Kensington Gardens I should stop a moment to peer in beneath their deep wide-branching trees, that at dusk are like the low ceilings of old, panelled rooms. I should stop to choose with care my way among them, and then

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I should take it at a great gallop, for I should believe that beyond the trees, if only I went fast enough, my horse would suddenly spread wings and carry me out by the narrow path between day and night.

THE HOUSE WITHOUT A HISTORY.

There is no doubt about the house. Stow, in his Chronicle, says that it is of brick and that it stands in a court which is handsome, large and airy, and hath a very good freestone pavement neatly kept. Also he gives the name of the Alley and the Building on either side of it; and the original name of the court itself; and the second and finer name which later it received on account of the goodness both of the houses and of the inhabitants; and even the name of the gentleman into whose garden the windows of the house once looked.

Moreover, although the garden has gone with the years and the court become less large and airy, yet the house still stands and men occupy it, and it still is called by the name which its goodness earned for it over two centuries ago. The odd thing about it is that between that day and this

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nothing of it is known. Men have asked about it and written about it, but no one has ever found what has happened nor who has lived in that house. It has stood there all the time, but its history through two centuries is as unknown, and it seems as untraceable, as the history of a coin which comes to you with the date of its minting upon it, but the story of all its wanderings beyond any power to discover. You feel the awful strangeness of such oblivion when you pick up any old coin and think of the thousands of hands through which it has passed, and the things for which it has been given and the happiness it has bought; but it is still more strange when this oblivion falls upon a house which has stood unchanged in the same place for two hundred years. It was built. It is there now. And everything between is forgotten.

You go beneath a deep arch into a little paved court, and upon one side, looking across at modern buildings, is the house. Its windows are tall. Its bricks are black with age. Within, it is all whispering, yielding wood. Old, empty, panelled houses are in some strange way alive. The dry wood seems, as you put hand or foot upon it, to shrink at the touch as if, like a sentient thing, it feared pain. And so at once one steps carefully in these old houses, and touches gently; and one

THE SILENT HOUSE.

falls into a whisper when one speaks; and doing all this one begins to imagine things, the things that may have happened; and to think that they must have been sad or terrible; and to listen for footsteps, and voices, and the rustle of clothes, and to wait for the touch of stealthy hands. Such is the spell that old wood lays upon you. It has a magic that is not in stone or iron nor any other thing; and it lays its spell when it has been dead hundreds of years, when it is wrinkled and dry and crumbling to dust, the same spell, half of wonder half of fear, that it lays upon men in the darkness of living woods. When we build with this living thing, we do not know what it is that we bring into our houses nor what strange and terrible things it may set men imagining of us hundreds of years after we are dead. So it is with this old house that has no history.

There is indeed nothing strange nor terrible in it, neither in its narrow stairs, nor its spacious, habitable rooms, nor its tall windows, nor its fireplaces which are open and beautiful, nor its cellars, nor its little green yard to which you look through as you enter the front door. Yet tales are told of this house and no one seems to know whence the tales come nor why they should be told of it; and when they are examined they drift into nothing.

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The house is haunted. Those who work there after dark hear things moving, and they open doors thinking that someone has come into the next room. But the ghosts do not haunt it in any burdensome or terrible way, communicating fears that they themselves have known or horrors that they have suffered. They haunt it rather as ghosts might haunt those houses where no sad and cruel things have ever happened.

No one knows why ghosts come to old houses. Living we would not willingly visit again those houses where we had once lived, only to find others living there and to see the change in once familiar things. And if the living will not willingly do this, why should the dead? And so men believe that if the dead return it must be for some terrible reason, for punishment, or expiation, or a warning. But there is another reason. It may be that this house is haunted because it has no history, that these ghosts are like the stirring of things in a man's mind as he tries to remember; and they will haunt it until its history is known. So long as men wonder, and imagine, and tell terrible tales of it that are not true, so long will ghosts disturb its quietness. Whatever happier worlds await them they must still inhabit this place trying to tell men what they know. But if its history were found then would this house, with its whispering

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old wood, no longer be empty and the ghosts need inhabit it no more.

If you were to ask me I should say that nothing ever happened in that house, except all those things which happen in all our houses; and enough of laughter and wisdom, among the rest, to keep it habitable and clean. If someone were to write a book, and were to make his people live in that old house; if he were to describe its stairs, its rooms, its fireplaces, and the view from its tall windows across the court, so that many would know it although they have never seen it; if he were to order the lives of his people without crime, or madness, or unnatural suffering—without any of those things that seem to come into men's minds under the spell of old wood, then I think that the ghosts would be satisfied and would leave the house. They would no longer try, vainly and sadly, to tell its true story. For they would see it inhabited now with simple lives like their own. They would know that the spell of the old wood had been lifted and that since the house was no longer empty this craving of men to fill it with sad and terrible things would no longer ask to be satisfied. So the ghosts would go away.

In time the old house would be pulled down. A new and taller building would rise there of iron and stone, and the old house be forgotten. Until

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some day an antiquary would find that the familiar house in the book which people still read, had once been a real house and had stood on this very site. He would write about it, imagining how the real house must have looked, and others, reading this, would come and look also and talk of "vanished things." Then a tablet would be put up on the side of the new building, now itself no longer new, saying that here once stood the house of the book. And many would then believe that the people in the book, whom they knew, had really lived in this house, for no one, they would say, could have written such a tale out of his own head. So at last it would be altogether forgotten that once this house had no history at all and was full of ghosts vainly trying to whisper it to men.

WILL O' THE WISPS.

That day was very strange. From its beginning Time had gone wrong. It had gone wrong in all the trivial and ordinary ways in which on any day it may go wrong. The odd thing was that it went wrong in all of them together on that one day.

It went wrong first with a clock that as a rule kept good time but on that morning was half an hour late. I love clocks. I would have them everywhere in a house, not that I might know the time but because I like to hear them. I would have them in every room and of every kind, chiming clocks and cuckoo clocks, clocks swinging great pendulums, clocks with weights that climb, and little stolid ordinary clocks that do no more than tick along their steady unchanging path through Time—all clocks I would have except the noiseless clocks. For a ticking clock is companionable in the same grave way as a cat.

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They are both undemonstrative, aloof, self-sufficient, mysterious, yet with a clock as with a cat you know that you are not alone in the room.

I like too a little irregularity in a clock. It becomes then more human. A mistake of half an hour is a mistake that anyone might make, particularly at night. Yet on this morning when we began the day half an hour late it fell rather hardly, for I had many things to do and had them all arranged in advance. I went through all the morning at odds with Time, getting no satisfaction from anything that I did, for everything was spoilt by being done a little too hurriedly.

The day was wasting, and I had meant it to be so full and satisfying and to leave me at the end tired, but with many things done. At midday I put off an appointment. So I caught up Time and went to lunch with the afternoon before me, fair and clear as I had planned it.

At lunch I met a friend. He was full of a new play and we fell to argument. With Time what he was that day I should have watched him continually. Instead I forgot him altogether. We sat on until the room was empty and the waiters stood about and watched us. Then, when I suddenly remembered Time again, I fled away. Already the afternoon was spoilt. Yet

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still Time had not done with me. In the morning he had started me wrong and then left me to struggle on my way as best I could. In the afternoon he haunted me through the streets. I was conscious of the Time in a new and fearful way. He was with me always, but it was the wrong Time, wrong in a more awful sense than unpunctuality, wrong in the sense of something twisted and queer.

I had never before noticed so many public clocks that had stopped. Perhaps there were not more than usual out of repair and it was only that on this day I noticed them, and yet I felt, as I looked at one after another, not only that they had stopped, but stopped, as it seemed, always at some fantastically wrong time. I felt as if Time itself had stopped—stopped for everyone else in order that he might give himself up to playing tricks on me. I looked very often at my own watch and held it to my ear, and its quiet face and sober tick were very comforting. So long as I had that watch I had the right time. I clung to that.

So I went through the afternoon. One odd thing after another troubled me, yet not one of them by itself was worth a moment's thought. I went part of my way by 'bus, a journey I had made very many times, and sometimes it took as little as twenty minutes, but never more than

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thirty. This afternoon it took three quarters of an hour. Yet it seemed like any other journey. I looked at my watch several times but where that time was lost I do not know.

It was already late in the afternoon, and I walked now trying to think of other things than Time, when there came on me suddenly the strange feeling that everything I thought I had thought before. I had never felt it with such disquieting certainty as this. I tried not to think. I looked at my watch and the feeling passed away, but it left me afraid.

I was in Bloomsbury, but forgetting altogether why I had come and what I had to do, I turned southward. It was beginning to grow dusk in the squares, but in the street by which I now went it was already half night. The street was empty and the houses were unlighted. It was at all times a quiet, dull street, one of those streets with nothing by which they can be recognised except their relation to others round about them. This street might have been in almost any other part of London. It might even have been in another town. It struck me now for the first time, looking at its dusky emptiness, that it might be in any time.

I passed no one, but from some side street which I could not see came the clear whistle of a boy.

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He was whistling an old song, one of those popular songs that blaze across the town for a year as fiercely as a gorse fire, and as suddenly fall into ashes and are forgotten. To hear one of these dead songs sung again is like meeting a ghost. It was such a song that the boy was whistling. All the town had sung it five years ago and no one had ever sung it since. It shrilled out across the houses, this strange thing that belonged to another time, until the boy must have turned a corner or entered a house, for the song stopped suddenly, unfinished, and I went on in silence down the haunted street.

At the bottom was one of those theatrical costumiers that are found here and there in the little streets of this neighbourhood. It was the one lighted window and I stayed to look at it. A suit hung there making the rough figure of a man, with full skirted coat and embroidered waistcoat, knee breeches and buckle shoes; a soldier's scarlet tunic lay beside it and a tricorne hat; and in front of the hat two or three slim swords.

I looked up at the name above the window but it was too dark to see. I knew the shop. I knew that within were costumes of all the ages that have been, and stranger costumes that belong to no time at all, yet as I looked at that window in the dim light, at the skirted coat and the hat and the

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swords, I thought, though I tried not to think it, that it might have been a tailor's shop of two hundred years ago. Before I left the window I looked in its light at my watch. It had stopped.

The Strand was aroar with 'buses as I crossed it, but the little streets on the south were as dark and still as the streets to the north. Below was the river, and the buildings on either side were lodging houses or obscure hotels. At the door of one of these two men were talking, foreigners as I knew by the intonation of their voices before I heard a word, and as I passed the only word that I heard was "Caballo."

At that word my mind suddenly jumped the years, back to a room of scarred desks that cramped the knees, of tall Gothic windows, and of a polished table where the master's cap lay on a pile of papers; and I saw faces and suddenly remembered names that I had forgotten for years. The boy beside me was on his feet. He had Cicero's "On Rhetoric" in his hand and had just stopped reading out the sonorous Latin. He had stopped at the word "equum" while the master talked of the difference between the Latin of the Rhetoric and the Latin of the street, and told us how Cicero would have talked of horses as he lay at dinner.

No doubt the man on the hotel steps in this street

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near Charing Cross was only a commercial traveller from Italy or Spain. But why on this day of all days when Time had all gone wrong, should I have heard suddenly in the darkness this slang word of the Roman street. I ran. I ran as if the ghost of some Roman horseman were indeed behind me. I ran as if all the way from Bloomsbury coming down hill towards the river, from the sound of the dead song, by the window with the suits of two hundred years ago, I had been going back down the years, away and away from my own time. I ran as if there at the bottom of the street I might catch it again before it had gone.

As I crossed the Embankment a tram passed and I jumped aboard. I looked at the people in the crowded car with a pleasure that I had never known before. The sad, tired cockneys going home were citizens of my own time. The tram was brilliantly lighted, and as we moved along beneath the plane trees I turned and watched the river in the autumn dusk. There was no mist, it was all a beautiful, clear, steel-grey—the moving water, the bridges and the further shore; and on the water, and over the bridges, and up and down the houses across the river danced little pale lights. They seemed to go with us. They must be, I thought, a reflection from the lights on the upper deck of the tram, such reflections as some-

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times a double window throws outside it; and as the tram swayed so they sprang and danced. How clear and beautiful they were moving about the grey water! What a rare night it was! So I watched them—and then suddenly it came to me that, beside the red and the warm orange of the lights on the shipping, they were too clear. They were as pale and cold and spectral as moonlight—and how they danced! That feeling from which I had fled with the word “caballo” in my ears, came on me suddenly again. Those lights dancing about the river did not belong to any London that I knew.

These must be the lights that danced above the marshes far away “in the dark backward and abysm of time,” before the Romans built their walls on the hill above the river, before the Britons pushed their coracles among its reeds, perhaps before there was any England at all, when the wandering Thames found no sea but flowed on and on until it reached the Rhine.

I knew then what a man’s country was to him, for I was losing its very shape. I stared and stared through the windows at those spectral, dancing lights, feeling in that awful moment that England literally was being taken from me. And as I stared, suddenly across the river other lights flamed out in the dark sky. In great scarlet

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words they told me to buy "Smith's Imperial Shirts," for these were "England's Glory," and then beneath the words came a little zig-zag of red lights, and as they ran, green lights followed them. They were running round the coast of England. The red and green lights stopped, and for a moment before they began again, the whole of England stood out clear and still in gold. And then I knew that England was England and that I was back in my own time.

THE END.

